RELIGION AND THE CITY IN INDIA

Edited by
Supriya Chaudhuri

ROUTLEDGE

Religion and the City in India

This book offers fresh theoretical, methodological, and empirical analyses of the relation between religion and the city in the South Asian context.

Uniting the historical with the contemporary by looking at the medieval and early modern links between religious faith and urban settlement, the book brings together a series of focused studies of the mixed and multiple practices and spatial negotiations of religion in the South Asian city. It looks at the various ways in which contemporary religious practice affects urban everyday life, commerce, craft, infrastructure, cultural forms, art, music, and architecture. Chapters draw upon original empirical study and research to analyze the foundational, structural, material, and cultural connections between religious practice and urban formations or flows. The book argues that Indian cities are not 'postsecular' in the sense that the term is currently used in the modern West but that there has been, rather, a deep, even foundational link between religion and urbanism, producing different versions of urban modernity. Questions of caste, gender, community, intersectional entanglements, physical proximity, private or public ritual, processions and prayer, economic and political factors, material objects, and changes in the built environment are all taken into consideration, and the book offers an interdisciplinary analysis of different historical periods, different cities, and different types of religious practice.

Filling a gap in the literature by discussing a diversity of settings and faiths, the book will be of interest to scholars of South Asian history, sociology, literary analysis, urban studies, and cultural studies.

Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor Emerita in the Department of English at Jadavpur University, India.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction
Religion and the city in India

Supriya Chaudhuri

The relation of religious beliefs and practices to urban forms – of settlement, infrastructure, economy, and social organization – has become the focus of intense scholarly attention over the past two decades and more. To some extent, this 'turn' towards religion in the city was prompted by the realization among western urban anthropologists that the historically long-drawn-out and theoretically vexatious set of changes known as modernization, and its product, modernity, were by no means tied to secularization as their necessary constituent: or at least that this knot was more complicated than earlier supposed. In a lecture delivered at the Nexus Institute, Tilburg University, in March 2007, the very year that Charles Taylor published his magnum opus, *A Secular Age* (2007), the philosopher Jürgen Habermas noted the challenges to the secularization thesis that had been based on the Weberian idea of a progressive 'disenchantment' of the world with the advent of modernity. In the face of what he called a worldwide 'resurgence of religion', he reflected on the emergence of 'postsecular societies' in the affluent west, societies that had to adjust themselves to the continued existence, or new energies, of religious affiliations and movements in a secularized environment (Habermas 2008: 17–20). In fact, desecularization and religious resurgence had been diagnosed considerably earlier (see, e.g. Berger 1999), and Harvey Cox, author of *The Secular City* (1965) had written on the demise of secularization, 'the single most comprehensive explanatory myth' of the twentieth century, at the very close of that century (Cox 2000: 4). José Casanova has recently offered a historical perspective on the contemporary intertwining of 'global religious and secular dynamics' (2019). Unsurprisingly, given the assumed connection between modernity and urbanization, these debates rapidly made their way into the field of urban studies, as exemplified in Beaumont and Baker's edited volume titled *Postsecular Cities* (2011) and in a growing body of new research.

Most of these debates, even when they took a global perspective, were located in the western academy. Indeed, it was to societies that had already experienced a phase of 'secularization' that Habermas sought to apply the term 'postsecular': as Kim Knott put it, 'The term postsecular must mean after the secular and refer to the return of religion to public life from its private haven' (Knott 2010: 28). This premise limited the term's application, while it also raised questions about the nature of the secular, its separation of

public from private life, its association with a western model of 'modernity', and, concomitantly, the definition of religion itself and where it belongs. Citing Talal Asad (1993, 2003), among other critics of conventional notions of secularism, Casanova took it as granted 'that "religion" is a modern category, constituted by the epistemic hegemony of "the secular" and that the so-called "world religions" are inventions of western secular Christian modernity' (Casanova 2011: 253). At the same time, it was undeniable that modernity was not exclusively western, nor were disputes over secularization limited to Europe. Saba Mahmood, studying the women's mosque movement in Cairo, found that her groups were concerned about the 'increasing secularization of Egyptian society, an important consequence of which is the erosion of a religious sensibility they considered crucial to the preservation of "the spirit of Islam" (*ruh al-islām*)'. Pressed to define what they meant by secularization, her respondents spoke of a type of 'westernization' that had reduced Islam to an abstract set of beliefs that had no direct bearing on the actual conduct of life, and Islamic knowledge to the status of mere 'custom and folklore'. This process appeared to have 'a transformative force beyond their control that was corrosive of the sensibilities and habits of a certain kind of religious life' (Mahmood 2005: 43–44). Such issues drew attention as anthropologists, sociologists, cultural historians, and religious scholars commenced new enquiries into contemporary religious life, into multiple modernities, into religion's role in global and national politics, into intercultural ethics, and into the religious practices, habits, and spatial dispensations visible in urban settings (e.g. Casanova 2011). Given that these enquiries originated in a sense of present-day crisis and even threat, most of them had a contemporary focus, even where a historical perspective was available.

Urban sociologists also tend to work on present-day phenomena, but in both urban studies and the history of religion, the 'reciprocal formations' of religion and urbanity are clarified by a rich body of historical and anthropological scholarship on the cities of the ancient and medieval worlds, looking at myths of origin, protection, and patronage; at shrines, cults, and ritual practices; at religious communities, immigrants, interactions, and conflicts; and at everyday lived religion within urban spaces. While the importance of religion in establishing or sustaining civic order and political power in antiquity is well acknowledged (see Strathern 2019), less understood, according to Jörg Rüpke and Emiliano Urciuoli, is 'the *specific urban character* of religious ideas, practices, and institutions and the role of urban space shaping this very "religion"': a phenomenon to which they apply Stephan Lanz's term 'urban religion' (Urciuoli and Rüpke 2018: 118; Rüpke 2020: 3). Working with relatively loose definitions of 'religion' on the one hand and 'city' on the other, they propose, following Kim Knott (2005) a 'spatial turn' to the investigation of urban religion, ending with three key concepts: (1) *agency and aspiration*, (2) *spatial imagination*, and (3) *appropriation*, to be applied to empirical studies of Mediterranean cities in antiquity (Urciuoli and Rüpke 2018: 120–127). To some extent, therefore, the secularization debate in urban studies might be provisionally set aside for a closer historical examination of the character of

urban religion, using terms already current in the scholarship on religious place-making in contemporary cities (see Burchardt and Becci 2013: 12–17; Knott, Krech and Meyer 2016).

Urban studies in South Asia, particularly India, is a notably rich and diverse field, and there also exists a considerable body of excellent historical scholarship on ancient and medieval cities, on urbanization and urban decay, on the making of port towns and trading entrepôts, and on the dynamics of colonial city planning, spatial segregations, architecture, land use, settlement, and appropriation. There is also an immense volume of work on the history of religion, on religious concepts, and on contemporary religion interconnected with questions of politics, caste, citizenship, and secularism (e.g. Devadevan 2016; Fuchs and Dalmia 2019; Ramanujam 2020). A small proportion of this work is referenced in the chapters collected here. But apart from some exceptional individual studies, there have been surprisingly few examinations of religion and urbanism. As Smriti Srinivas, herself the author of one of those exceptional studies (2001), later observed, writing on religion in Indian urban contexts tended to focus on two predictable themes: (1) on religious habits, rituals, and social practices as a failure of the modern/modernizing project that shapes 'the city as a secular realm or site for liberal enactments of citizenship' or (2) on religious nationalism, communal violence, and fundamentalisms. She drew attention to the 'theoretical neglect of the myriad religious forms that are embedded in the processes of contemporary Indian urbanization' noting that 'there is an urgent need to address how the Indian urban is produced by agents and communities who bring a range of religious imaginations and practices to the city' (Srinivas 2012: 70). In her own earlier work, she had looked at the Karaga *jatre* in the city of Bengaluru as an urban mnemonic, sacralizing civic history through ritual performance, and located three types of ritual centres producing 'specific mediations of the space of the city and its markets' while they constructed 'memories of older places and the sacred' (Srinivas 2001: 17). Other remarkable individual treatments include Yamini Narayanan's study of urban planning in Jaipur (2014) as reflecting a sacred Hindu topology and *In the Name of the Goddess* on the Durga Pujas of Kolkata by Tapati Guha-Thakurta (2015), who is one of the contributors to this volume. Yogesh Snehi's study of Sufi shrines in Punjab (2019) is not about cities, but he has a chapter here on street shrines in Amritsar.

Additionally, some collections, like those edited by Van der Veer (2015), Narayanan (2015), and Waghorne (2016) deal with religion and the city in Asia/South Asia, but only a few chapters engage directly with Indian cities and the place claimed in them by religious practices, imaginations, and material insertions into urban space. The essays in Narayanan's *Religion and Urbanism* contribute to the 'sustainable cities' debate in South Asia by reflecting on the intersections of religion and urban heritage and informal religion. In the specifically Indian context, these matters have received some scholarly attention, often in the form of individual research articles – for example, the 2018 issue of the *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, devoted to wayside shrines in India, or Madhuri Desai's work on Varanasi (which

includes a monograph). Still, at the time of writing, there is no book on religion and the Indian city that covers both a diversity of faiths and a range of urban sites, bringing in questions of history, textuality, material culture, caste, everyday life, space, built heritage, and politics.

In a celebrated passage of his book *The Urban Revolution*, Henri Lefebvre described the urban as 'a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity':

> Living creatures, the products of industry, technology and wealth, works of culture, ways of living, situations, the modulations and ruptures of the everyday – the urban *accumulates* all content. But it is more than and different from accumulation. Its contents (things, objects, people, situations) are mutually exclusive because they are diverse, but inclusive because they are brought together and imply their mutual presence.
>
> (Lefebvre 2003: 118–19)

Cities are material assemblages made of 'flesh and stone' (Sennett 1996), but they also contain the immaterialities of conceptual ordering, individual aspiration, religious motivation, and imagined community, while they 'engage most palpably the tumult of citizenship' (Appadurai and Holston 1996: 188). As Doreen Massey suggested, these are spaces of 'coexisting heterogeneity': open, in process, and constantly being remade (Massey 2005: 9), like religion itself. Religious faith and its observances, in the assembly of a great metropolis, leave 'iconic' inscriptions upon urban space (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016), while religion is itself shaped by spatial forms and social contiguities, making a series of unplanned, even makeshift, accommodations with built environments and human needs.

In an Indian metropolis, lived religion has multiple manifestations, both private and public. 'Lived' with respect to mental life (Simmel 1969: 47), religion is experienced in household interiors accommodating personal spiritual and ritual exercises, as well as in public edifices, such as mosques and *dargahs*, temples, gurudwaras, or churches. Historically, such sacred sites might have stood 'at the centres of networks of urbanism and redistributive flows' (Srinivas 2001: 16). Within the built environment of the city, they function – to a greater or lesser extent depending on religious affiliation – as economic centres, attracting trade and traffic, vendors and visitors. But everyday religion also engages in *place-making*, or the continuous claiming or appropriation of city spaces through material signs and tokens. Such appropriations, often subaltern and non-elite in character, produce the Lefebvrian lived space, *l'espace vécu*, linked to 'the clandestine or hidden side of social life' (Lefebvre 1991: 33). Space here is 'directly *lived* through its associated images or symbols', which 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate', overlaying physical space by making symbolic use of its objects through 'more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs' (Lefebvre 1991: 39). Robert Orsi defines 'everyday religion' as 'not solely or primarily what happens in specially designated and consecrated sacred spaces, under the authority of religious elites, but in streets and alleys' determined by the 'circumstances and

exigencies' of people's lives. 'The everyday religious is not performed by rote or in accordance with authority; it is improvised and situational' (2012: 150).

Everyday religion asserts its right to the Indian city in two ways. On the one hand, it lays claim to the urban fabric through a multiplicity of small consecrations, such as a pavement shrine or an icon at a tree's root, obstructing pedestrian movement while it circulates symbolic capital, and even acting as a temporary portal to the realm of the sacred for the passer-by who stops to pray. On the other hand, large public performances of religious faith, as in processions, festivals, or collective prayers, periodically occupy city streets for intense but ephemeral displays of faith or worship. The first type of claim makes relatively small but permanent or semi-permanent appropriations of the city's space. The second produces large-scale but impermanent transformations of neighbourhoods and habitats. The street serves as a median space between private and public since the intensity of personal faith is combined with the relative anonymity of the thoroughfare.

The material inscription of religious practice into urban space thus appears as a process through which the largely neutral and mechanical built apparatus of the modern city can be reclaimed for affective rites that are both private and collective. Even at the simplest level, the tying of a pitcher of holy water around the trunk of a tree or the rudimentary application of reddish-orange pigment to a root creates a sacred space within the dead surfaces of everyday urban existence. The gesture that claims them for a religious purpose has the anonymity of the subaltern, while it allows private feeling or individual hopes or prayers to be legitimized through the urban collective. In effect, these gestures serve as a critical commentary on the instrumental, functional view of urbanism that modernity projects. But politics, money, and popular fervour are also invested in public displays of religious devotion – ranging from building new temples or mosques to holding festivals and processions – which make more visible and contentious claims upon urban space. Religion is commoditized at one level and becomes an ideological instrument at another. In India today, religion and politics are closely intertwined: religious prejudice constitutes political capital, as the ruling party extends its majoritarian support base and uses the spatial contiguities of urban living to provoke communal conflicts.

The chapters in this volume do not follow from a single set of theoretical premises, and their interdisciplinary range extends from textual and historical studies to close ethnographic analyses. They were specially commissioned from scholars representing disciplines from history and sociology to geography, political science, and literature. What brought us together was a common interest in religion's place in the city: a domain of belief, affect, and practice shaping, and being shaped by, the physical spaces, the material infrastructures, the aspirations, and the social densities of the urban assemblage. In every recourse to theory, we have tried to be attentive above all to historical and material context. Given the immensely complicated and regionally diverse histories of religion in the Indian subcontinent, these enquiries are only a sampling of the kinds of investigation that are possible. They do not offer a single sequential narrative,

nor even an exhaustive set of microhistories. Still, as volume editor, I was delighted to observe that although the contributors chose their own subjects and did not write in consultation, the chapters spoke to each other, producing unexpected pairings and convergences.

Thus the first chapter, my treatment of an episode in the sixteenth-century Bengali *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, describing the building of a temple in a city (or rather the making of the city to house the temple of the goddess Caṇḍī) is directly complemented by Ranjeeta Dutta's examination of a city within a temple in early modern Śrirangam. Both the imaginary city of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* and the actual urban conformation of Śrirangam are richly plural civic spaces. The poet, Mukundarāma, sets down in unprecedented detail both the spatial organization and the densely assembled urban orders of his ideal capital, embracing diverse religious hierarchies, as well as a multiplicity of trades and professions, commodities and manufactures, while *kāyastha* ploughmen are settled with rent-free lands in its agricultural periphery. Within the urban settlement Mukundarāma projects, Caṇḍī is installed in the palace among shrines to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Durgā, flanked by mosques for the city's Muslim population to the west. The mythical entry of a forest-dwelling goddess (*araṇyānī*) into the city of early urbanism – indeed, her commanding that city into existence – thus involves an exercise in world-making, with the poet drawing upon the history of his own time to describe the intricate social stratifications and spatial orders of the early modern city in Bengal.

By contrast, Ranjeeta Dutta's study of the interactions of sacrality and urbanity in Śrirangam in Tamil Nadu shows how urban space came to be organized within the seven walls of the Ranganathasvami temple itself. The history of the town and its expansion demonstrates not only how religious life generated a thriving economy but also how sectarian conflicts impacted structures of power, affected religious hierarchies and political struggles, and revealed the growing influence of monastic lineages or caste groups. Despite the enshrining of the image of a Turkish Muslim princess near the *sanctum sanctorum* of the god Ranganatha, the town's history cannot be reduced to a narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict or of syncretic mingling. Rather, its character was determined by changes in settlement patterns in the ever-expanding hinterland; by the emergence of pilgrimage networks, divergent political narratives, and Śrivaiṣṇava hagiographic traditions; by religious schism; and by the absorption, accompanied by ritual ranking, of local artisanal, peasant, and marginalized castes into temple services. The hierarchical arrangement of Śrirangam's urban space is thus not a static order but a dynamic relation between religion and urbanism, calling into question any rigid separation between sacred and secular spaces.

Raziuddin Aquil's chapter on the historically cosmopolitan culture of the city of Delhi returns us to an earlier period, that of the Sultanate during the thirteenth century, when the destruction by the Mongols of the great Islamic cities of Central Asia had made Delhi one of the principal refuges of Islam, hosting large numbers of displaced migrants who brought with them a variety of religious and intellectual traditions. The early arrival of the Chishti Sufis was critical, Aquil argues, to shaping a liberal and inclusive culture in

the capital city (*dar-ul-khilafa*), which remained a seat of political power for close to six centuries while it acquired the status of a centre of Sufi spirituality, respectfully addressed as Hazrat-i-Dehli. Tracing a fascinating political history marked by bloody internecine power struggles, as well as strong resistance to the might of the Mongols and local rebels, Aquil also delineates the changing spatial contours of the city of Delhi, especially the new, somewhat bohemian, city resort of Kilokhari and its adjacent Ghiyaspur on the bank of the Yamuna. This site was incorporated into Islamic sacred geography, even after it had lost political importance, by the shrine of the charismatic Sufi saint Hazrat Nizam-ud-din Auliya (d. 1325).

The next two chapters focus on aspects and episodes of colonial history. Haig Z. Smith examines how the growth of the East India Company's (EIC) commercial interests and political influence in seventeenth-century India also produced increased anxiety about the religious health of Protestant Englishmen and women in its service, exposed, as they were, to the cosmopolitan and multi-religious environments of Bombay, Surat, and Madras. While the EIC leadership provided regulated spaces for religious observances by their employees, they policed them by making attendance compulsory. But given the religious diversity of India's port cities, the EIC was compelled to strategize its response through a policy of reluctant toleration or sufferance, together with what Smith calls a 'passive evangelism'. Nevertheless, religious sufferance did not translate into religious understanding since Protestant prejudices were manifested in a series of witchcraft accusations and trials from the late 1650s onwards. Smith tracks the complex set of responses and manoeuvres by which the EIC negotiated the religious plurality of the cities they controlled in order to secure British commercial and political interests.

Parjanya Sen examines the quite different set of imperatives that drove a Buddhist revival movement in colonial Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth century, led by an active community of Theravada Buddhist worshippers, a 'secular' community of (largely Hindu) sympathizers, and a group of British and Indian antiquarians and pedagogues practicing the new disciplines of archaeology and museology. Interestingly, Sen cites Trevor Ling's placing of both the decline and the revival of Buddhism in India within a framework of urbanism, although the vestigial survival of Mahayana Buddhism in rural East India enabled the emergence of a figure like Kripasaran Barua, founder of the Bengal Buddhist Association. The chapter draws together the strands of religious faith, of affective nationalist nostalgia, and of scholarly antiquarianism allied to archaeological discoveries that co-produce the distinctively urban phenomenon of a religious revival that links local faith to world religion and overlaps with the academic study of monuments, traditions, and texts. As Sen shows, the cultural contingencies within which this revival takes place leaves its trace upon urban architecture, as upon colonial curricula, as witnessed in the building of the Maha Bodhi Society's *mahavihara*, where the Bhattiprolu Relic was placed in 1921, and the creation of a Department of Pali at the University of Calcutta (1907).

The hill tracts of Chittagong, where the young Kripasaran Barua, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was inspired by a Buddhist reform movement to take his neo-Buddhist proselytizing mission to the city of Calcutta, are geographically not far from the district of Faridpur in East Bengal, where, around the same time, the Matua *dharma* (faith) originated among the oppressed (deemed 'untouchable') caste of the Chandals, renamed as Namasudras. Here too, as Sipra Mukherjee explores in her chapter, there is movement from the rural to the urban, from the periphery to the centre, with consequences both for the Matua faith and its subaltern adherents and for the urban orders that it penetrates. In tracing the Matua trajectory from its initial agrarian setting to its entry into Calcutta, Mukherjee finds that the urban majoritarian (Hindu) context leaves its stamp on what had been a non-conformist, anti-caste movement emphasizing both physical labour and devotion. The chapter examines the interplay of negotiations and appropriations between the small and great religious traditions, noting that the Matua dharma's urbanization led on the one hand to its self-identification as a type of Hindu Vaishnavism rather than a small dissenting sect, and on the other hand to questions of political citizenship. Indeed, in the run-up to the 2021 Assembly elections in West Bengal, every major political party is canvassing Matua votes in return for citizenship papers.

If the first chapter discussed the entry of the goddess into an imaginary city, then that goddess – under another name – is already installed, though as a temporary visitor, in the crowded modern metropolis examined by Tapati Guha-Thakurta. Her richly illustrated chapter on the Durga Pujas of contemporary Kolkata explores the fluidity of boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the artistic and the religious, showing how a religious festival's material expressions are thickly embedded within the lived fabric of the city. Drawing upon Giorgio Agamben's theorizing of 'profanation' as a process by which the consecrated object of the divine is continually returned to 'the free use and property of men' (Agamben 2007: 73), she examines the recycled lives of remnants, turning her attention from the energy and creativity behind art and craft production in the festival's making to the many forms of unmaking and destruction that leave their equal imprint on the urban landscape. Focusing on impermanence, transience, and cyclicality, Guha-Thakurta demonstrates how the logic of ephemerality has generated a festival economy of waste and dispersals, of recycling and reuse, tied to a year-round cycle of festivities in Bengal, and propelling large movements of creative skills, labour, and material within and beyond the city. The chapter comments, too, on the unfulfilled desires for preservation and permanence with which the urban festival must contend as it engages with new circuits of artists and art productions.

Sukanya Sarbadhikary's chapter also addresses the aesthetic dimensions of religious behaviours, not in the visual realm but as affecting the senses of sound and touch. Sarbadhikary draws critical ethnographic lessons from the making and playing of the *khol*, a percussion instrument accompanying the *kirtan*, a sung genre of devotional music central to Bengal Vaishnavism. Discussing the *khol's* contemporary urban life in Kolkata, her chapter offers

an ethnographic close reading of the relationship between a famous percussionist and the *khol* maker whose family has supplied the instrument for generations. Together, player and maker have redefined the instrument's meaning and its sacrality through such idioms of urbanity as skill, livelihood, innovation, inter-instrumental soundscapes, and classicism, thus 'secularizing' its associations within a modern urban work ethic. But the most crucial distinction, that of caste, remains, separating the traditionally lowest 'untouchable' castes involved in making the *khol* from the upper castes usually involved in playing it. The *khol's* tactile and auditory aesthetics involves a subtle mind-body continuum connecting maker to player, yet the distance between them is actually increased by the urban context. Sarbadhikary theorizes the 'urban postsecular' as a kind of remnant: nostalgia for the *khol's* sacred past on the one hand and caste-based exclusion on the other. Like Guha-Thakurta, she is interested in residues or refuse (for which she uses the Bengali terms *ucchishta*, 'leftover', and *asparśa*, 'untouch') as categories produced by the domain of the sacred, but she uses these terms very differently to theorize the afterlives of caste within contemporary urban settings.

Epsita Halder's chapter looks at the doubly minoritized status of Shia Muslims in Kolkata in the context of their ritual practices and everyday religion. It examines three Imambaras, spaces of Shia ritual mourning, as sites of urban contestation, where Shias can be seen to enact new modes of identity formation and community networking. While much ethnographic scholarship focuses on the 'Muslim ghetto' as a product of socio-economic and spatial marginalization, the Shia question remains less explored, especially in the urban context where representation and citizenship are crucial. Shia mourning practices during Muharram are deprecated by the Sunni majority but have secured administrative protection in Kolkata. As Halder's study of religious and social activities at the Imambaras shows, the Shia community's modes of civic participation are directed by its will towards self-defence and self-identification. The Imambaras, therefore, are no longer pure ritual space but sites where trans-local, trans-territorial networks of belonging can be accessed. Conscious of its marginal status, the Shia community appears to be tapping into these networks, and into a legendary past, to ensure its place and visibility in the modern city.

The Ashura procession during Muharram is one of those discussed by Nilanjana Gupta in her chapter on processions as a form of urban religious performance. Using Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'porosity' of city spaces, Gupta reflects on the complex relations of power, community formation, identity, and sociability that are negotiated by participants, onlookers, and state actors during a religious procession. Reading Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Buddhist processions, Gupta examines the webs that connect the devout, the citizen, and the community identities of individuals to the space of the city, especially through a series of interviews with Tarakeshwar pilgrims and their wayside helpers. The occupation of city spaces by processions or festivals is not so much an incursion of the religious into the secular as it is a way of asserting community solidarities, urban aspirations, visibility, and citizenship. In any case, distinctions between sacred and secular spaces or between 'private'

religious observances and 'public' religious performances are impossible to sustain in the context of the Indian city, especially a 'porous' city like Kolkata.

Yogesh Snehi's chapter opens up a further area of enquiry into popular everyday faith by looking at *urs* celebrations at Sufi street shrines in Amritsar. These festivals, devoted to saints like Sakhi Sarwar, Baba Farid, Khwaja Khizr (Jhule Lal), Sabir Pak, and local *pīrs* through a blend of pre- and post-Partition commemorative practices, hybridize identities in contemporary Punjab and work to unsettle the neat labels of 'Hindu', 'Sikh', or 'Muslim'. Street shrines are embedded in the long history of space in Amritsar. They function as sites of living memory, transforming the city streets and engaging people from diverse castes, classes, and religious groups to rupture both communal and nationalist narratives of the city. Snehi argues that popular religion must be seen as overlapping layers of religious practices that delineate the lived and the everyday, imagining and negotiating religious identities through processes such as shrine visitation, veneration, and memorialization. In fact, as Snehi shows, street shrines of Amritsar present a dissenting form of sacred practice located between two major religious sites entrenched in the political discourses of Tat Khalsa and 'reformed' Hinduism since the 1920s, the Golden Temple and the Durgiana Temple.

Space is also in focus in Aparajita De's chapter, exploring how Hindus and Muslims in the walled city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat manage the challenges of living together with religious difference. Historically, the walled city, popularly known as *Kot*, is a much-fragmented space, visibly ruptured along lines of religion, caste, and occupation and especially through the Hindu-Muslim divide. Spatially, neighbourhoods and residential localities articulate religious difference through boundary-making processes. But there are also, De argues, less visible boundaries running through the social and working lives of Hindus and Muslims, semiotically loaded with meanings of trust, respect, recognition, and the possibility of betrayal. These may be regarded as 'spatialities of feeling' and are related to the consciousness of religious identity, value, and belonging. Physical proximity within the *Kot* produces a heightened awareness of difference, even of conflict and contestation, but also opens up the possibility of convivial spaces that engage with difference and make sense of it. Religious spatialities and meaning-making are not mutually exclusive, De suggests, but entangled in the cognitive act of knowing one's place as well as that of the other.

The final chapter, by Pralay Kanungo, turns to the deeply contentious subject of urban religious heritage in the 'sacred' city of Varanasi. As Kanungo notes, heritage is mostly created and recreated in the interests of the powerful, who have the resources to legitimize or delegitimize the term, and heritage discourses in the contemporary world are increasingly tied into questions of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, history, and identity. The ascendancy of Hindu nationalism or 'Hindutva' in India has projected an exclusive Hindu past and sought to obliterate the history and heritage of other communities, such as Muslims and Christians. Kanungo focuses on the entangled histories of Hindus and Muslims who share cultural, artistic, and artisanal heritage in the multi-religious and

multi-cultural city of Varanasi, while the city's architectural monuments, sacred sites, and urban spaces bear witness to historical acts of destruction, appropriation, and reinvention. He shows how Varanasi's status as the 'holy city of the Hindus', vigorously promoted in contemporary politics, is also built upon processes of erasure and neglect, with serious concerns not just for Muslim sites but also Varanasi's urban character and the natural heritage of the river Ganges.

The range of this book thus extends from imaginary to real cities, from the temple town to the sacred city, and from colonial port cities, such as Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, to older urban settlements such as Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Amritsar. In looking at religion's place in the city, and at urban reshapings of religion, it engages with questions of space, sacred architecture, communities, religious sects and revivals, politics, caste, artistic and cultural production, processions, popular faith practices, communal coexistence, and urban heritage. It theorizes these questions with strict attention to material contexts, using literary, archival, ethnographic, and historical data. We hope that it will make a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between religion and the city in India, though in the end, such relations remain too complex, too extensive, and too diverse to be covered by any single volume or study.

Note on Transliteration

Since the chapters in this volume draw on different languages, regions, and periods, it was difficult to decide on any uniform system of transliteration, such as the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) for words of Sanskrit origin. It seemed preferable to keep diacritical marks to a minimum and allow contributors to choose their transliteration practices.

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1 The making of a city

Religion and society in the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* of early modern Bengal

Supriya Chaudhuri

Introduction

In the *Ākheṭika-khaṇḍa* (*Book of the Hunter*) of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* composed by Kavikaṅkaṇa Mukundarāma Cakravarti during the second half of the sixteenth century in Bengal, there is a detailed and scrupulous account of the building of a city, in consequence of a gift from the goddess Caṇḍī and in order to establish her worship on earth. This episode, and its place in the poem as a whole, has drawn comment from historians as well as literary scholars, particularly in the context of the religious and political changes taking place in Bengal between the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, from its conquest by the Turkish general Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji (1204–1205 CE) to its annexation (March 3, 1575) by the Mughal Emperor Akbar. During this period, the region witnessed sustained agrarian expansion, accompanied by Islamicization of the population, as well as growing economic prosperity owing to thriving commercial networks in the Bay of Bengal. While the earliest texts claimed for a specifically Bengali literary history are the Buddhist *caryāpadas*, discovered by the nineteenth-century scholar Haraprasad Shastri and dating from around the tenth century, Bengali literature witnessed a notable efflorescence from the fourteenth century onwards under the sultanate, especially the 'golden' period of the Hussain Shahi dynasty (1494–1538). Both the sultans of Bengal and independent Hindu dignitaries extended patronage, in a multilingual setting, to Hindu and Muslim poets writing in Bengali; scholarship in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit; advances in philosophy and logic; and Bengali works on Islamic themes, such as Shah Muhammad Saghir's adaptation of the *Yusuf-Zulaikha* (dedicated to Sultan Ghiyathuddin Azam Shah, r. 1389–1409) or Syed Sultan's syncretic chronicle of the lives of the prophets, the *Nabi-baṃśa*, written in Chittagong near the end of the sixteenth century.

Up to the time of the Vaiṣṇava saint Caitanyadeva (c. 1486–1534), Bengali literature is roughly divisible into three main strands: translations and imitations of Sanskrit texts, including the epics; Vaiṣṇava lyric and devotional poetry (*padāvalī*); and the *maṅgalakāvyas*, narrative poems celebrating the auspicious aspects (Sanskrit *maṅgala*, 'auspicious, beneficent'; *subst.* 'well-being') of local gods, goddesses, and saints venerated in folk religion by non-Brāhmaṇical,

'subaltern' social orders or 'lower castes' (*antyaja*) in eastern India (see Bandyopadhyay 1951; Sen 1960). This last genre, to which the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* belongs, is seen by Sukumar Sen as a subdivision of the class of performative narrative poetry known as *pañcālikā*, having a visual accompaniment and including recitative or sung forms, such as *vrata-kathā* and renditions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, though the *maṅgalakāvyas* are distinct in form and content (Sen 2013: 17). These date, according to some scholars, from the thirteenth century onwards (Bhattacharya 2000: 8), while others place the earliest exemplars in the fifteenth century when they were written down (Mukhopadhyay 1993: 1; Curley 2011: 184). They draw on much older goddess cults and folk religious practices at the popular or subaltern level that were gradually being assimilated, through the Bengal *Purāṇas*, into hegemonic Brāhmaṇism and Vaiṣṇavism, following the decline of Buddhism after the tenth century (Bhattacharya 2000: 55–69; Chakrabarti 2018: 165–233, 300–303; Chatterjee 2009: 90-95). Scholarship on the *maṅgalakāvyas*, where it is not primarily philological, has explored this history, and the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, in particular, has been mined for ideas of sovereignty, war, patronage, royal and mercantile exchange, caste, religious community, kinship and marriage (Bhattacharya 1981; Chatterjee 2013; Curley 2008; Eaton 2011: 108–109). Less directly examined is the foundational relation between religion and the city that is presented in the poem, though it has been linked to perceptions of the city in pre-British – a period also tending to be described as *pre-modern* – Bengal (Dimock and Inden 1989: 113–129; Chatterjee 1992: 188–189; Inden 1967: 21–46; Ray 1992b: 158). This is important, because the *maṅgalakāvyas* have otherwise been read as representative of a predominantly non-urban and agrarian literary culture (Bhattacharya 2000: 1–8).

The *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*

The *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* of Mukundarāma Cakravarti was composed, according to Ashutosh Bhattacharya, in the last decade of the sixteenth century, though Sukumar Sen argues for a much earlier date, between 1544–1545 and 1555–1556 CE. Dates for the poet's life and death are conjectural, based on his own references to historical persons (Mukhopadhyay 1993: 121–135; Bhattacharya 2000: 408–409; Sen 2013: 38–42). The poem exists in numerous manuscripts, though none dating from the assumed time of composition, and the first printed edition is from 1823-1824 (Bhattacharya 2000: 12–15; Vidyasagar 1823–1824). Mukundarāma's is one of several treatments of the Caṇḍī narrative, including that of Manika Datta in north Bengal (see Ojha 1977), and Mukundarāma's contemporary Dvija Mādhava (1579; see Bhattacharya 1957), writing in East Bengal.[1] The oldest of the *maṅgalakāvyas*, the *Manasāmaṅgala* or *Padma-purāṇa*, exists in numerous versions all over Bengal (see Bhattacharya 1935; Bhattacharya 2007; Haq 2015). Many others, like the *Dharmamaṅgala*, *Śitalāmaṅgala*, *Ṣaṣṭhīmaṅgala*, *Kalikāmaṅgala*, and *Gaṅgāmaṅgala*, also narrate stories of autochthonous deities from folk religion, some already assimilated to the Vedic-Brāhmaṇical tradition codified

through the *Purāṇas* (a process completed by the time of Bhāratacandra Rāya's eighteenth-century *Annadāmaṅgala*). Thus the goddess Caṇḍī, originally a fierce, solitary, forest-dwelling, demon-vanquishing figure accompanied by ghosts and wild animals, progressively acquires a mythological family and is vividly described in the *Devī-māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (sixth century CE), where she is given the names Durgā, Caṇḍikā, Kālī, Cāmuṇḍī, Vaiṣṇavī, Nārāyaṇī, Gaurī, Śakti, Mahāmāyā, and Maheśvarī and venerated as the consort of Śiva (Chatterjee 2013; Chakrabarti 2018: 165–233). So too the figure of Śiva, a traditional protector of rice-cultivating agrarian communities, incorporates both the powerful Mahādeva of the Purāṇic trinity and the neglectful husband and *gāñjā*-smoking ascetic of folk tradition. Kunal Chakrabarti describes how the Sanskrit *Purāṇas* and *Upapurāṇas*, incorporating post-Vedic mythology and narrative, were constantly being added to in regional versions that directly influence the *maṅgalakāvyas* (Chakrabarti 2018: 300–303 et passim). Dinesh Chandra Sen designated the literature of this period as a 'Pauranic Renaissance' (Sen 1954: 143–332). The core *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* stories of Kālaketu and Dhanapati are summarized in a verse of the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, the last of the 18 *Upapurāṇas* and dating from around the thirteenth century (Hazra 1963: 445, 456–460). The *maṅgalakāvyas* also show influences from Buddhist and Tantric traditions, regional cults, legends of the Nātha yogis, Vaiṣṇava *padāvalīs*, and popular Islam. The *Rāyamaṅgala* of Kṛṣṇarāma Dāsa (late eighteenth century) extols a Muslim *pīr* (holy man) or *Gāzi*, and Muhammad Shahidullah points to the existence of a subgenre of *pīr-maṅgala* (or *Gāzi-maṅgala*) literature, celebrating the miraculous exploits of powerful Muslim *pīrs* (Shahidullah 1965: 249; Stewart 2004). What is most striking about the *maṅgalakāvya* genre, however, is its focus upon the human world of action and adventure, of everyday life, domesticity, and worldly concerns, as they interact with supernatural agents. Despite their mythological content, these poems reflect contemporary social conditions, especially the changing religious and political economy of early modern Bengal.

Mukundarāma's *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* is divided into four parts: the *Vandanā* (Hymn to the Gods), the *Deva-khaṇḍa* (Book of the Gods), the *Ākheṭika-khaṇḍa* (Book of the Hunter), and the *Vaṇika-khaṇḍa* (Book of the Merchant).[2] The first is a standard set of invocatory verses. The next three books contain the narrative, with events in the divine realm linked to consequences on earth. Written in a combination of three metres, *payāra* (rhymed couplets of 14-syllable lines) *ekapadī* (couplets of 12 or fewer syllables per line), and *tripadī* (3-section lines in divisions of 6-6-8 or 8-8-10 syllables), it is intended to be sung over a period of eight days, in divisions called *pālās*, sung alternately during the day and at night: a total of usually 16, but here 14, *pālās* (in Sen's edition). In the Book of the Hunter, the goddess Caṇḍī, in order to establish her worship on earth, contrives to have Nīlāmbara, son of Indra, cursed by Śiva so that he is born on earth as Kālaketu, son of the low-caste hunter Dharmaketu. Kālaketu becomes a mighty hunter and lives with his wife, Phullarā, killing animals in the forest while Phullarā sells their meat,

skin, tusks, and yak-tail whisks in the market. The forest animals, fearing extermination, appeal to Caṇḍī to save them, and she responds by concealing them from Kālaketu's sight. He rages through the forest, finding no prey, and ultimately brings home a golden monitor lizard, leaving it tied up as he goes to look for Phullarā (on the lizard, see Chakrabarti 2018: 240). Phullarā comes home to find that Caṇḍī has transformed herself from lizard to beautiful woman; angry and jealous, she begs her to leave, and Kālaketu adds his plea to hers, saying that as a high-caste woman, she has no place in a lowly hunter's hut. Threatened, Caṇḍī reveals herself in the divine form described in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and gives Kālaketu a precious ring and a hoard of treasure, commanding him to sell the ring, build a city with the proceeds, and establish her worship in a temple therein.

The making of a city

Kālaketu sells the ring, obtains great wealth, and buys weapons, armour, royal trappings, horses, elephants, and provisions, as well as implements like axes and hatchets for labourers who will cut down the forest of Gujarāṭa and build his city. This is neither the western Indian state of Gujarat, whose name is derived from that of the *Gurjara* people and *rāṣṭra* (Skt. 'state'), nor the city in Punjab province of present-day Pakistan where Akbar built a fort in 1580, forcing Gujjar pastoralists to settle there by 1600, when the city was named after them (Hunter 1885: 365–366). That Kālaketu's city bears this name suggests a contemporary trading connection, not a direct reference to urban centres in western India.[3] Mukundarāma describes how the labourers assemble: a hundred forest dwellers from the north, another community of 500 from the south, and 2,000 Muslims from the west under the leadership of Daphar Miyan, who pray to their *pīr* and the prophets of Islam (*paigambar*) before setting to work to clear the forest and establish a market. Kālaketu kills the wild tigers that terrorize his men, while Caṇḍī sends the craftsman of the gods, Viśvakarmā, with the mighty Hanumāna, to build the hero's palace: a huge, fortified building a *kośa* (two miles) square, with strong walls, many courtyards and water tanks, stone steps, and a stone platform. Within the palace are the temples of Caṇḍī, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Durgā. Bricks are fired to build a rest house for travellers, an orphanage, and residences for Muslims in the west, where there are mosques and communal kitchens. This walled town with its four gates, built by the divine workman Viśvakarmā, is equal, we are told, to the god Indra's capital Amarāvati, Rāma's Ayodhyā, and Kṛṣṇa's Dvārakā. But Kālaketu is unhappy at not having enough citizens and prays to Caṇḍī to populate his city (Sen 2013: 66–73, *CM tritiya divasa, niśā pālā, pada* 109–119).

The goddess now sends floods and cyclones to the neighbouring kingdom of Kaliṅga (a sadly recurrent feature of climate history, if we identify Kaliṅga with modern Orissa), forcing large numbers of its citizens to migrate to the new town of Gujarāṭa, having lost their goods and possessions.[4] They are led by the *kāyastha* headman Bulāna Maṇḍala, who is promised rent-free lands

by Kālaketu, with no taxes to be paid for seven years, only a plough tax payable when the cultivator has the means to do so. After a brief disruption caused by a *kāyastha* rival, Bhāṃḍu Datta, there follows an elaborate account of the various communities that settle in Gujarāṭa and are given the ceremonial gift of *pāna* and *guyā* [*supārī*] (i.e. betel leaf and areca nut) by the hunter, in addition to rent-free land and dwellings. The first to be listed are *ashraf* Muslims from western India: *saiyyads* (belonging to the Prophet's family), *maulānās* (learned men) and *kazis* (jurists), as well as Pathan clans and more recent converts to Islam (of doubtful piety), all of whose religious practices and social habits are described in detail. Next to receive the hunter's *pāna* are Brāhmaṇa settlers, commencing with those of high family and renown and moving down the social scale (as in the case of the Muslims) to illiterate priests who extort alms from their clients; astrologers; Vaiṣṇavas; *kṣatriyas* and Rajputs who practice martial arts; *vaiśya* merchants, with an account of their trade; *vaidya* physicians, including fraudulent ones; and the virtuous community of *kāyasthas*, from 100,000 households in Kaliṅga, who ask for cultivable land and money to buy bullocks and receive a loan of 100,000 silver coins. The various trades pursued by different communities in the town of Gujarāṭa range over the social hierarchy from ploughmen, oil-pressers, iron-workers, *pāna*-makers and cultivators, potters, garland-makers, barbers, sweet-makers, Jains who weave fine cloth, perfume and conch-shell merchants (*gandhavaṇika* and *śaṅkhavaṇika*), makers of bell-metal utensils, gold-merchants (*suvarṇavaṇika*), goldsmiths, and cattlemen (*gopas*), as well as more humble fishers (*kaivartas* and *dhīvars*), musicians, mat-weavers, bangle-makers, liquor sellers, washermen, tailors, jaggery-makers, pālānquin-bearers, boatmen, jugglers, snake-charmers, *caṇḍālas*, drummers, grass-cutters, leather-workers, and prostitutes, many assigned to separate designated areas of the city (Sen 2013: 73–83; *CM tritiya divasa, niśā pālā, pada* 120–136).

However, the villainous Bhāṃḍu Datta incites the king of Kaliṅga against Kālaketu and his 'city in the forest', and a terrible battle follows in which Kālaketu is ultimately taken prisoner. His prayers to Caṇḍī are rewarded by her immediate intercession on his behalf. The king of Kaliṅga releases Kālaketu and sends him back to his kingdom, loaded with honours, to rule Gujarāṭa successfully until the period of the curse ends and he returns to heaven as Nīlāmbara. The next section, *Vaṇika-khaṇḍa*, narrates another bid for worship, as Caṇḍī extends her reach beyond the world of women to that of the merchant Dhanapati in the city of Ujāni.

Why does Mukundarāma include this extremely elaborate account of the building and settling of a city in a fabular narrative about the origin of Caṇḍī's worship on earth? The description itself, excluding preliminaries like the goddess Caṇḍī's commanding Kālaketu to build a city where she might be worshipped and the war that ensues after the city attracts the anger and envy of a neighbouring sovereign, occupies at a rough count 26 *padas* (verse segments of about 50–60 lines each) out of 117 in the Book of the Hunter, or just under a fourth of the book. Given that the pace of the narrative is otherwise unrelenting, why is there this relatively static loco-descriptive interlude

dominated by a careful listing of communities, castes, occupations, and objects of urban material culture in sixteenth-century Bengal? For there can be no doubt that even if the main outlines of the plot were fixed long prior to Mukundarāma's writing of his version, and the idealized architectural plan of the city may follow ancient exemplars such as Amarāvati, Ayodhyā, and Dvārakā, the account of its residents, and the pronounced materiality of the urban setting, comes from the poet's own experience. Yet it is important to note that while the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* offers, like other poems in its genre, a foundation myth regarding the earthly institution and worship of a *deity*, it does *not* narrate the foundation myth of an identifiable contemporary *city*. In this respect, its narrative is not comparable to the foundation myths of many Greek cities, nor even to the *sthala-purāṇas* that relate the origins of particular shrines or temples, or the *tīrtha-māhātmyas*, which act as guidebooks for pilgrims, also, like the *maṅgalakāvyas* themselves, derived from vernacular and regional expansions of the *Purāṇas*. Kālaketu's Gujarāṭa is an invented place with an unconvincing name, and there is no attempt to identify it with a known urban settlement, past or present.

In his study of Bengali *maṅgalakāvyas*, David Curley outlined (though he did not fully pursue) a structuralist, Levi-Straussian interpretation of the two apparently unrelated narratives of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* – the stories of Kālaketu and Dhanapati – through a set of paradigmatic relations between hunting and war, buying and selling, mercantile trade and royal tribute (Curley 2008: 3–7). But the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* requires more than one approach, from cultural anthropology to the history of religion to contemporary politics, trade, and travel, in order to do justice to the text's complexity and its location at a critical moment of Bengal's history. Even when focusing upon a single episode, like the founding of Kālaketu's city, we need to think not only about its function in the poetic narrative but also about the work it is doing in other, larger histories.

From forest to city

Let us begin with the contrast of forest and city. The emergence of the goddess Caṇḍī from her forest home to become a patron of royal power receiving worship in a temple dedicated to her within a city is a process that took place over many centuries. It is generally supposed that goddess worship preceded the Vedic-Brāhmaṇical traditions in India (i.e. before 1500 BCE) and that her cults were deeply entrenched in the east, especially in Bengal and Assam. She is referred to in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* as a fierce, forest-dwelling deity accompanied by wild animals, but at some point, she becomes associated with the feminine source of power, or Śakti, in early Brāhmaṇism. By the sixth century CE, she appears as a composite figure in the *Devī-māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (see Coburn 1991) and is manifested in this form to Kālaketu and Phullarā in Mukundarāma's *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* as the ten-armed goddess *Durgā Mahiāsuramardinī*, slayer of the buffalo demon, mounted on a lion and flanked by her children, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Kārtika, and Gaṇeśa (Sen 2013: 64; *CM tritiya divasa, divā pālā, pada* 106). In a sense, this process is

narrated in the poem itself since in the divine prelude to the earthly narrative, we are told that Durgā or Gaurī, Śiva's consort, leaves her husband's home in anger but is placated by a prophecy of her future worship on earth. Thereafter, she appears in a dream to the king of Kaliṅga and orders him to make offerings to her in a richly decorated temple (also built by the divine workmen Viśvakarmā and Hanumāna) on the bank of the river Kaṃsa. In his introduction, Sen speculates about the location of this temple, as if the description were a *sthala-purāṇa*, yet Kālaketu's Gujarāṭa remains unlocatable. In mythical terms, Caṇḍī, goddess of the forest (*araṇyānī*), not content with worship from forest animals and marginal populations, jealous of Śiva's popularity both in heaven and on earth, contrives her own transformation into a goddess of the city (Sen 2013: 18, 27–32; *CM dvitiya divasa, divā pālā, pada* 43–51).

In order to achieve this, it is necessary that the transition from forest to city also be undertaken by her protégé Kālaketu, a low-born hunter, fierce and violent in his ways, killing animals and trading in their flesh, hide, horns, and tusks, who becomes a benevolent sovereign, clearing land for agriculture, as well as for urban settlement, and encouraging trades and professions within a complex economy of commodity production rather than the simple market transactions of the primitive hunter-gatherer. In her novel *Vyadha-khaṇḍa* (1994), the Bengali novelist Mahasweta Devi used the figure of Mukundarāma Cakravarti, a displaced migrant in a strange land, to tell the story of the Śabar tribespeople of Bengal and Jharkhand who claim Kālaketu as their founding father. The Śabars, classified as a 'criminal tribe' by the colonial British government in 1871, were 'de-notified' by independent India in 1952, but their situation has not materially improved.[5] Mahasweta sees the forest-city opposition as almost wholly tragic. The Śabars cherish the golden-age myth of an ideal city ruled over by their king, Megha, but the loss of that kingdom has brought them back to the forest where they are sheltered by their goddess, Abhayā or Caṇḍī. The encroachments of the urban threaten the Śabar way of life, and at the novel's close, they look for sanctuary in a new forest, not in an imaginary city (Devi 1994, 2009). But this plangent ecological lament, associated with the uniqueness of indigenous, Ādivāsī culture, its rootedness in the forest, and the sacredness of tribal knowledge, is missing in the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*.

Despite the extraordinary wealth of ecological detail in which Mukundarāma describes the forest, trees and plants are listed only to be cut down, and the tangled botanical wilderness is replaced by the complex stratifications of urban materiality: place-making, domesticity, ritual, commodity production, and social custom. Even in the description of the forest-clearing process, there is a distinction between the *wild* and the *cultivable* (analogous, we might say, to the *raw* and the *cooked*): weeds, creepers, and undergrowth that can be hacked down and sacred or domestic plants that must be preserved:

> They cut down reeds, *khāgara* reeds, bamboo shoots, vine canopies, nettles, thorn apple, chaff-flower, clinging vines, bruschia, *nehālī*, *āṭisara* grass, *kāṭasara* grass, lobelia weeds, gandal creepers, thistles, gnarled tamarisk, jungle undergrowth, tridax, nightshade.… They kept *rudrākṣa* trees,

nutmeg/mace, clove trees, *mālati* and *mallikā* jasmine flowering plants, *nehali*, plumeria, *bhujangakeśara* [also known as *nāgakeśara* flowers], hibiscus, crepe jasmine, holy basil, and jungle geranium. They saved *karuṇā* citrus, tangerine trees, citrons and pomelos. Palmyra, and coconut trees beautified the city; they kept wood-apple trees for the worship of Śiva. They kept that abode of the goddess *Ṣaṣṭhī*, the banyan tree. That gigantic tree was left for the peoples' resting place. They employed a mason who constructed a platform at its base.

(Trans. Yazijian 2007: 211–212; Sen 2013: 69–70; *CM tritiya divasa, niśā pālā, pada* 115)

The city-space that results, while answering a divine command and built by divine architects, does not simply meet a devotional purpose. Caṇḍī's temple is placed within the palace, and she receives the worship of the sovereign, but the city itself, containing many other religious communities, functions as a plural, complex space whose heterogeneity confirms the heterogeneity of the world itself, where gods and goddesses do not expect to have sole power but claim the recognition and honour appropriate to their status. Significantly, Caṇḍī's temple in the palace is not described in detail, taking its place beside other urban shrines to Viṣṇu and Śiva. Marcel Detienne says of the gods of the Greeks,

> In a polytheistic society, the gods are everywhere. But not in a random manner. There are certain domains in which they seem to be concentrated, certain types of experience in which they are organized in unusual or improbable ways. The multiplicity of gods makes it possible to think through and form an image of a large number of the activities and problems that people encountered in their social lives.
>
> (Detienne 2006: 99)

This is only partly true of Hindu polytheism: to think of a goddess like Caṇḍī as answering a social need is to misunderstand the relation in which she stands to civil society, on which her claim is that of a foremother whose debt must be paid, though she might promise civic prosperity and honour if she is adequately propitiated.

Of these transitions – forest to city, forest deity to civic goddess, hunter to king – it is the last, Kālaketu's elevation, that involves the most violent social reordering. Though the legend assigns him a divine origin, within the world of the poem, he is firmly placed in the lowest social category (an 'untouchable' caste) of those who make a living by hunting animals and selling their flesh and skins, almost outside of, or a stranger to, the settled orders of agrarian society. At the same time, the violence of his way of life is – as Mukundarāma clearly sees – allied to the violence of the warrior caste, and is the necessary basis of kingly power, so that Kālaketu's first actions on becoming possessed of great wealth are to acquire weapons and royal accoutrements.

Kālaketu repeatedly expresses anxieties about touch, related to his own 'low' birth, telling Caṇḍī that she should bathe if she touches anything in his hut, asking her whether any Brāhmaṇa will consent to be his priest, and later telling the king of Kaliṅga that he is too low-born to bless him (Sen 2013: 62–63; *CM*, *tritiya divasa, divā pālā, pada* 103; on touch and caste, see Jaaware 2019). Yet Mukundarāma, himself a learned Brāhmaṇa poet who tends to import high-caste rituals into inappropriate social contexts, such as the wedding of Kālaketu and Phullarā, is also ironically aware of the way in which social stratifications are regularly breached through access to power or wealth. Caṇḍī assures Kālaketu that a Brāhmaṇa priest will undoubtedly agree to act for him if he is rewarded, and the king of Kaliṅga anoints his forehead with a sacred *tilaka*. Much of the poem's satiric energy and humour are derived from its perception of class and caste as *both* fixed and shifting, as an identifiable feature of its social materiality but subject to disruptions caused by divine whim and historical circumstance.

Urban orders in Kālaketu's city

The social conditions of sixteenth-century Bengal are reflected most directly in the settling of Kālaketu's capital, where Muslims play a major part in clearing the forest and are described as having their brick houses to the west of the palace. Later, they are the first major group to arrive from Kaliṅga and receive the king's ceremonial offering of *pāna* before taking up residence in the western part of the city. Two points should be noted here: first, they are twice placed in the west (west of the palace and in the western part of the city) and described as having come from the west, and, second, a substantial proportion constitutes an urbanized upper class, though some are labourers involved in clearing the forest. Over a period of four centuries, Bengal had witnessed unprecedented demographic and religious changes through the Islamicization of its population, a phenomenon discussed by Richard Eaton. However, Eaton is particularly interested in this phenomenon as a feature of *agrarian* history, speaking of Muslim groups, led by charismatic *pīrs*, or saints, as clearing land for agriculture and settling in prosperous rural communities around a mosque or a shrine (Eaton 2011: 228–267). This would have been a well-recognized pattern of agrarian settlement in sixteenth-century Bengal when Mukundarāma was writing. The Hindu *kāyastha* settlers who are described as arriving from Kaliṅga, led by their headman Bulāna Maṇḍala, are explicitly identified as tillers of the soil and given rent-free land with a plough tax to be imposed when they are able to pay it. Earlier in the poem, 2,000 Muslims, led by their headman Daphar Miyan, have taken the lead in clearing the forest to set up a market. But the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* fable, as Mukundarāma receives it, speaks of the founding of a city, not simply the clearing or settling of the land. It is, therefore, significant that the second group of Muslims that Mukundarāma describes in such detail here are urban citizens: they are imagined as fitting into an elaborately hierarchical and

precisely delineated urban social order. However 'imaginary' this city is, its basis must be Mukundarāma's own understanding, from experience or report, of urban planning and architecture, and of the intricate, closely woven web of social orders that come to populate such a space. In sixteenth-century Bengal, high-ranking Muslim groups take precedence in urban, as in rural, configurations. They are essential to the conception of a realized urbanity where Caṇḍī's worship is not a matter of a single temple erected by a royal devotee but the installation of a major divinity in a richly plural civic space.

Mukundarāma, therefore, begins with an account of the prayers, customs, education, and social divisions among Muslims in the city (thus between high-ranking *ashrafs* and lower orders of recent converts who do not offer the mandatory five daily prayers or keep *roja* during Ramadan). The trades and skills of this community make them an essential part of the closely stratified civic order described in the poem (by no means a standard civic inventory). It is they, in a sense, who set the pattern for the later description of Hindu castes and professions, beginning with high-ranking Vārendra Brāhmaṇas with their Viṣṇu temples and caste observances; followed by illiterate cheating priests and all the other castes and trades, including merchants who regularly travel outside the city; Rajputs and Jains who bring their crafts into it; those who live on its outskirts, such as jugglers and boatmen; and those who wander about within it, such as the *caṇḍāla* who sells salt and water chestnuts. This crowded, vivid account, densely packed with information about the distribution of social groups in the early modern city is an exercise, we might say, in a form of world-making. It is this 'worlding' that the goddess requires of her devotee, not worship alone, since she has already obtained worship from Kālaketu's overlord, the king of Kaliṅga. The sylvan, riverside setting of that earlier temple might seem to confirm the contrast Catherine Asher draws between the 'visual vocabulary' of Hindu shrines as opposed to Islamic religious architecture. Asher finds that while 'Islam has manifested itself boldly in urban settings', Hindu temples in north Indian cities are relatively unobtrusive and self-effacing, as if remembering 'those settings deemed ideal by Sanskrit texts – among trees, hills, and bodies of water' (Asher 2000: 139). This is not true, however, of the Caṇḍī temple in Kālaketu's palace, which claims the city as its appointed setting, a city that Kālaketu must build so that Caṇḍī can take her place among other deities and sites of worship. What the goddess gains by entering, indeed by commanding into existence, the rich, complex, heterodox space of a city made up of different social groupings, many faiths, cults and sacred spaces, multiple trades and professions, persons who come and go, commodities, objects and consumables that circulate, are bought and sold, is access to what Henri Lefebvre, centuries later, was to call 'a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity' (Lefebvre 2003: 118). Mukundarāma is not a philosopher of the urban, but the city that he provides for his goddess is not so much a 'temple town' as a space where religion can *become* urban.

The city and history

Where is this city in history? Several decades ago, Edward Dimock and Ronald Inden reflected on the city and the 'Hindu chiefdom' in pre-British Bengal, asking how far Mukundarāma – himself a beneficiary of the patronage extended to him by a minor Hindu ruler, the Bāmkuḍā Rāya and his son, Raghunātha Rāya, at the court of Āraḍā in Brāhmaṇabhūmi (Medinipur, southern Bengal) after he had been forced to leave his native village of Dāminyā (near Barddhaman) because of the depredations of one of Raja Man Singh's officials – was drawing on his own experience (Dimock and Inden 1989: 113–129; Sen 2013: 32–37). Kālaketu's city, Dimock and Inden argue, is not a conventionalized description based on the fame of older trading cities in deltaic Bengal like Tamralipti and Gangadvip, as Ashutosh Bhattacharya had suggested: it is an idealized account, an image of what a city should be. In this respect, though they do not use this term, it is a utopian construction, and like all utopias, it is conceived through an intricate ordering of space. While Bhattacharya had based his suggestion on archaeological excavations of city sites in deltaic Bengal that showed evidence of flourishing trade networks, Dimock and Inden point to the numerous comparisons in Mukundarāma's text between Kālaketu's city and the legendary capitals of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, Ayodhyā and Dvārakā. 'The city', they write, 'is not taken out of the space of the immediate by theological necessity, as are the places and people of the Vaisnava texts, but by the demands of a literature that had to be both edifying and entertaining'. It is 'not a real town, but the "realistic ideal" of a town' (Dimock and Inden 1989: 118). The fact that the principal work of building the palace, as well as the moat and ramparts of the town, is given to the divine craftsmen Viśvakarmā and Hanumāna confirms them in this view. Even after reviewing the elaborate description of religious communities, clans, trades, and professions in the city (more than 25 Muslim and 60 Hindu groups), Dimock and Inden are convinced that this 'complex urban centre' is more a 'chiefdom' than a city (see Inden 1967). It is Mukundarāma's vision of an ideal, imaginary society, with a permeable boundary between the urban and rural, and new settlers being given cattle and ploughs. In the 'random' observations with which they close, they speculate that this vision is common to nearly all Bengalis, especially those who go home for the Durgā-pujā and carry in their hearts the image of an unspoilt village or perhaps a festive city (ibid. 127–129).

But this is not my reading of a remarkable episode in a rich, layered, and complex text. Mukundarāma undoubtedly drew upon stylized and ideal elements for his description: one prominent strain is the subgenre of town description in classical Sanskrit literature and the epics. The employment of divine artisans obviously confirms that influence. But the building methods – the use of the measuring tape, the firing of bricks, the pouring of stone chips, the intricate workmanship involved in inlay and carving – suggest a different model, one derived from contemporary building by Muslim artisans in a rapidly urbanizing Bengal. For although there are utopian elements in

Mukundarāma's imagined city, and especially in its treatment of space and social order (the two principal elements of utopian imaginings), the social stratification and the material, object-loaded density of civic life that mark his description are derived from knowledge of the composite culture of early modern cities, especially those on trading routes. What Mukundarāma describes is the kind of urban centre that exhibits

> substantial demographic concentration replenished continuously by demographic expansion and migration; complexity of habitat and a certain pluralism of orientation…occupational and skill-based diversity of its inhabitants; economic specialization characterised by complex divisions of labour…an elite sector of consumption of luxury goods…[and] an agricultural hinterland.
>
> (Datta 2019: 86)

It has long been argued – influentially by R. S. Sharma – that India underwent a period of de-urbanization or 'urban decay' following the end of the Gupta empire in the mid-sixth century CE, and that in Bengal, the process of re-urbanization was materially advanced by the arrival of the Turks in the thirteenth century (Sharma 1972, 1987; Habib 1978; Naqvi 1986; Thakur 1987). Other historians are not convinced by this thesis of urban decay (see Ray, A. 1992a, 1992b, 2015; Ray, N. 2013; Kennet 2013), and there is archaeological and numismatic evidence of the survival of some ancient towns, though less for urban growth prior to the Turkish invasion (Chattopadhyaya 1994; Ray, A. 2015). The Arab conquest of Sind and raids in western and central India helped to establish trade networks; eastern seaports, such as the port of Chittagong, continued to be active (Mukherjee 1982; Ray, A. 1992b). It appears, moreover, that

> the economic basis of the early urban centres of the Ganga basin was an agricultural surplus generated by new methods as well as by expansion of cultivation, and by the gradual crystallization of a power structure that ensured the production of surplus.
>
> (Chattopadhyaya 1994: 147)

Under Pāla rule, a regional economy had begun to emerge in Bengal by the eighth and ninth centuries, and Arab geographers of this period mention the quality of cotton textiles traded by the Candras, ruling in the southern part of the delta. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Senas were certainly building monumental temples and shrines, and Gaur and Pandua are described by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century visitors as walled cities, full of goods and people (see Bouchon and Thomaz 1988: 320–221 for a Portuguese account of Gaur from 1521; Ray, A. 2015: 164–190). Ray notes the inadequacy of archaeological excavation of sites in eastern India, as well as the changes in the urban landscape brought about by changes in river courses,

leading to cities being abandoned. What is relevant here is not so much the general case for urban decay, or continuity, or renewal, as the presence of thriving urban centres, trade networks, and a growing Muslim population by the time the *maṅgalakāvyas* were being written down (Bhaduri 1992: 30–39; Chaudhuri 2020). Rabindranath Tagore, no admirer of the genre, wrote disapprovingly of the 'tremendous disruption' (*pracaṇḍa upadrava*) through which Caṇḍī establishes her worship, seeing it as a reflection of historical power struggles and force as a social instrument (Tagore 1941: 442–443). Hitesranjan Sanyal speculated on the parallels between the Kālaketu story and the emergence of the 'frontier' principalities of southwest Bengal, ruled over by tribal chieftains like the Malla kings of Mallabhum with their capital at Viṣṇupur, noting the similarity of their foundation myths and their land-grant practices (Sanyal 1982: 6–14). Richard Eaton adduces numismatic evidence to show that

> the only known nativist rebellion mounted against the sultanate was waged in the name of Caṇḍī': the coins of Danuja Marddana Deva and his son Mahendra Deva, minted in Chittagong, Sonargaon and Chhota Pandua in 1417–18 CE, bore the legend '*Śrī Śrī Caṇḍī caraṇa parāyaṇa* (devoted to the feet of the goddess Caṇḍī).
>
> (Eaton 2011: 109)

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Mukundarāma, himself a landless exile, inhabited an unsettled polity, marked by extended political struggles for control of Bengal's major towns, as seen in the fall of Gaur in 1575 (Ray, A. 1992a: 68–70). By 1584, Bengal was, as Abul Faz'l makes clear in his detailed account of the Subah of Bengal in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the latest and most valued addition to the Mughal dominions, prosperous, fertile, and yielding large sums in land revenue (Jarrett 1891: 115–149).

Conclusion: Religion and urbanism

Richard Eaton, describing the spread of Islam in Bengal from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, speaks of it as 'a civilization-building ideology, a religion of the plow', enabling agrarian expansion through wet-rice agriculture, its carriers 'not the urban *ashrāf* but peasant cultivators of the eastern frontier' (Eaton 2011: 308). This phenomenon negates, he suggests, the stereotype of 'Islam as an essentially "urban" religion: a religion of shopkeepers and artisans focused on the city or town bazaar, or of administrators and scholars focused on *madrasas*, mosques, and courts of law' (ibid. 313). Conversely, Hinduism – an imprecise term for the folk religious practices and cults that provide the main content of the *maṅgalakāvyas* – has traditionally been seen as rooted in village, forest, and countryside. Yet even in mythical or legendary form, the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* account of Kālaketu's conversions – of himself from hunter to king, of the wilderness to the city of Gujarāṭa, and of the forest-dwelling goddess to a civic deity – offers a counter-narrative of urbanization.

Importantly, that urbanization requires both Muslim and Hindu agents, within a mixed, changing culture, its *ashraf* Muslim and caste Hindu elites constantly negotiating with indigenous populations, their folk beliefs and forms of worship, to arrive at a remarkable period of material and cultural efflorescence. Mukundarāma's *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* describes in unprecedented detail the conversion of forest land to an urban settlement drawing both on commodity production and trade, and on the extraction of agricultural surplus. It also describes the 'urbanization' of folk religious belief. The legend that Mukundarāma received exists for him in two contexts at least: as narrating the entry of the goddess Caṇḍī and her right to worship into the dense social stratification and religious diversity of early modern urbanism, and as an image, perhaps a mirage, of the utopian city built by divine artisans for a low-caste hunter beloved of the gods.

Notes

1 T. Bhattacharya (1919: 124–184) mentions 20 poets of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*. D. C. Sen (1914: 300–378) gives excerpts from ten.
2 I refer throughout to Sukumar Sen's edition (2013) by page number, with line references prefaced by '*CM*'. Other editions consulted include Cakravarti (1921), Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhuri (1958), Bhattacharya (1966), Das (1977), Mandal (1992). For an English translation of Sukumar Sen's text, see Yazijian (2007) and (condensed) 2015. With the exception of Cakravarti (1921) where no editor's name is given, all other editions of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* are cited under the editors' names.
3 In his eighteenth-century rewriting of the *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, Ramananda Jati criticizes Mukundarāma's 'error' in choosing this name. See Gangopadhyay 1969: 100–102; Yazijian 2007: 57–58.
4 In other versions like Dvija Mādhava's, Bulana Maṇḍala is threatened and commanded to migrate by Caṇḍī in a dream, and the devastation does not actually happen (see Bhattacharya 1966: 64; Curley 2008: 27, 69).
5 For the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group (newsletter, *Budhan*) see http://iref.homestead.com/dntrag.html; for a short piece by Mahasweta Devi, see https://www.countercurrents.org/devi121007.htm.

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2 Temple, urban landscape, and production of space

Śrirangam in the early modern Tamil region

Ranjeeta Dutta

This chapter will attempt to analyze the idea of a sacred centre as a town, focusing on the role of religious ideology in articulating a specific urban space. The exceptionalism of a sacred centre within urban studies raises certain questions. Does the urbanization of a sacred site involve specific and unique processes? How are sacred urban spaces different from secular ones? In the history of urbanization of the Tamil region, no strict dichotomy between the sacred and the secular is possible. Religion is part of the organization of a secular space, and the secular and the sacred interpenetrate each other. This is particularly true of Śrirangam where the urban space came to be organized within the seven walls of the temple. The temple, representing power and hierarchy, replicated the social structure. It was also a cosmic centre from which the Śrivaiṣṇava religious ideas were transmitted and received, not only within the precincts of the town but also to the ever-expanding hinterland. In fact, the town and the hinterland culturally influenced each other, revealing the limitation of any urban studies model projecting one-way transfer of resources from the agrarian hinterland to the town. Śrirangam was neither a capital city nor a political centre. Its uniqueness as a South Indian temple town was formed by shifting ideas of power, domination and political legitimation, an integral part of the interaction between sacrality and urbanism. Unlike the royal capitals of Thanjavur or latter-day Hampi, whose fortunes declined with the downfall of the Cholas and Vijayanagara respectively, Śrirangam has survived precisely because its sacrality has been responsible for its vitality, maintaining it as an important pilgrimage town.

My focus will be on the relationship between religious interactions and urban conformations from the thirteenth to seventeenth century in Śrirangam. Since temple towns in South India are usually considered mere pilgrimage centres imbued with devotion and piety, their character as urban centres manifesting equally important secular historical processes is virtually ignored.[1] This chapter will attempt to highlight Śrirangam as part of the phenomenon of urbanization and urbanism in South India, as one of several temple towns that are complex urban forms with distinct commercial identities, where religion plays an important role in the production of urban space.[2] Since Śrirangam today is significant in the community life of different religious traditions, has heritage status, and is politically a constituency of

influential politicians of Tamil Nadu, it is important to look at how changing traditions and their interactions with modernity produced alterations in urban topography over a period of time. A long view of Śrirangam is crucial in understanding the influence of historical legacies in modern times and the complex interactions of past and present, tradition and modernity.

The antiquity of Śrirangam as a sacred space for the Śrivaiṣṇava and Śaiva communities of South India is well recognized. The resolution of conflicts, negotiations involved, and arrangements arrived at in relation to urbanism, urban morphology, and the ways in which these aspects influenced each other shaped the dynamics of Śrirangam as an urban space. This resulted not only in economic growth but also in complex engagements with politics, ideology, and culture. Thus, along with trade and commercial activities, religious ideologies and identities, issues of political legitimation and structures of power and dominance generated Śrirangam's development as a pilgrimage town.

The chapter will be divided into two sections. Section I will briefly discuss the present character of Śrirangam. Section II will provide an overview of temple urbanism and relate it to Śrirangam. This section will analyze developments in religious identities and economic processes and their influence upon Śrirangam's urban morphology. To map the changes and continuities between sacrality and urbanism within the changing historical context, the research methodology will be based on an analysis of the epigraphical inscriptions on the temple walls (mostly official records of donations), Śrivaiṣṇava hagiographies, temple chronicles, and archival records.[3]

I: Śrirangam: The town and its description

Situated about seven kilometres from Tiruchchirapalli town in Tiruchchirapalli or Trichinopoly district, Śrirangam is an island town surrounded by the rivers Kaveri, lying north, and its tributary Kollidam, lying south. The settlement of Śrirangam has two main temples, the Ranganathasvami temple or Periya Koyil, dedicated to Viṣṇu, and the Jambukeshvara temple or Tiruvanaikkaval dedicated to Śiva, both important pilgrimage centres for the Śrivaiṣṇava and Śaiva communities, respectively, with approximately 2,000-year-old histories. The Nayanmars, early Śaiva saints, praised Jambukeshvaram in their hymns as the abode of Śiva, making it a significant sacred site in the Śaiva pilgrimage network. Likewise, the Alvars, early Vaiṣṇava saints, praised Śrirangam as an ideal sacred place for Vaiṣṇava devotion in their hymns composed between the fifth to ninth centuries CE. The Ranganathasvami Viṣṇu temple dominates the urban landscape of Śrirangam because of its height, scale, and unique structural layout. In fact, the temple is synonymous with the town, and most studies of Śrirangam have revolved around the temple and its adjoining settlements, both inextricably linked with the history of the Śrivaiṣṇava community and its religious traditions and ideologies. Śrirangam is regarded as one of the 108 sacred regions (*divyadeśam*), and along with Kanchipuram and Tirupati, the Ranganathasvami temple of Viṣṇu occupies a prominent place in the pilgrimage network of the Śrivaiṣṇavas. The

Śrivaiṣṇava community of South India, mainly confined to Tamil Nadu, southern Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, considers Viṣṇu as the supreme godhead, acknowledges Ramanuja, a medieval Vaiṣṇava theologist (eleventh–twelfth century CE) as its most important leader and regards the Sanskrit Vedas and the Dravida/Tamil Vedas or Tamil hymns of the Alvars, as its main scriptures.

Already prominent in the devotional hymns of the Alvars, Śrirangam emerged as the sacred centre of the Śrivaiṣṇava community in the eleventh and twelfth centuries due to its association with Ramanuja and his exposition of the Śrivaiṣṇava theology. From the thirteenth century onwards, the hagiographies, temple chronicles, and commentaries delineated Śrirangam as the reference point for the activities of all Śrivaiṣṇava *acharyas* or religious leaders, as well as the community. Today, it is the institutional centre for the Tenkalai subtradition of the Śrivaiṣṇavas. The Tenkalais represent the broader Tamil tradition, regarding the Dravida Vedas, the Tamil hymns of the Alvars, as their scripture, and they have a large non-brahmana following. Another Śrivaiṣṇava subtradition is that of the Vadakalai, whose institutional centre is the Varadarajasvami temple at Kanchipuram. They are considered more conservative since they give preference to the Sanskrit over the Tamil Vedas.

The temple complex, 156 acres with a perimeter of 1,116 kilometres, comprises seven rectangular-concentric walls called the *prakaras* with four gateways or *gopurams* along each *prakaras* forming an axial path[4] (Auboyer 1968: 21). The original temple precincts had three concentric wall enclosures; four were later added with the city's expansion, pushing the lateral boundaries to the main highway in the west and dense forests in the east. The largest *gopuram* in the first wall on the southern side, now 73-metres high, was completed as recently as 1987. Nearly the entire town and its settlements with their complex urban social life were located within the seven *prakaras*. The temple chronicle (*ca*. seventeenth century), the *Koil Olugu*, a register recording the donations received by the Ranganathasvami temple and the activities of Śrivaiṣṇava religious leaders, describes the town as follows:

> The street full of storied houses,
> The street of prosperous Trivikrama.
> The street of the Pāṇḍya Akaḷanga, skilled in dance,
> The street where Alinādan dwells
> The street of Kulaśekhara of Madura,
> The street of Rajamahēndra of noble descent and
> The street of the rare Dharmavarma – these are the seven prakaras that
> surround the God at Arangam of the South.
>
> (Rao 1961, *Koil Olugu* p.1 and fn. 1)

The temple and the town are almost synonymous with each other, blurring the distinction between sacred and urban spaces. The Jambukeshvara temple built southeast of the Ranganathasvami temple is also large in its proportions

and dimensions but has only one walled enclosure street, with the cluster of settlements lying outside the wall. Similarly, Madurai and Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu are two other temple towns similar to Śrirangam in their urban planning and conception, but they have four and five enclosures or *prakarams*, respectively, with settlements developing historically in concentric layers but situated outside the temples, unlike Śrirangam where the settlements fall mainly within the temple complex.

Around the temple, there was a horizontal stratification of residential areas and a ceremonial centre so designed and built that the city was spatially aligned symbolically to the forces of cosmic nature. The elites, primarily belonging to superior castes, like the *brāhmaṇas*, temple priests, landowners, and administrators, lived in the centre, and occupational groups like weavers, goldsmiths, oil-mongers belonging to marginalized castes and mixed castes had settlements around the outer premises of the temple (Younger 1993: 83). The monasteries belonging to different Śrivaiṣṇava lineages acquired significant administrative control over the temple from the thirteenth century onwards and were also accommodated within the temple precincts. Thus the seven walled streets around the Ranganathasvami temple were settled by 'servants of the temple, Brahman devotees, and later by artisans and tradesmen who provided the inhabitants with both the necessities of life and luxuries' (Auboyer 1968: 21).

This social demarcation of space still exists, but it is important to analyze the changes brought about by modernization. Today, the first four walls or inner *prakaras* comprise the population related to the temple but include other social and occupational groups. Several shrines are situated here, leading the worshipper to the main sanctum sanctorum (Younger 1993: 83). These inner four walls have roads running along the northern, southern, and western sides towards tanks, coconut plantations, and fields, all cultivated for the temple. The outer three walls today contain shops, dwelling houses, ascetic residences and monasteries (*mathas*), hospitals, banks, and so on, with some settlements spilling beyond the seven walls.[5] (Auboyer 1968: 21; Younger 1993: 83–85) Unlike most temples that face east, Śrirangam faces south, and the street from the south that leads to the temple is the busiest with many shops selling articles for worship, such as flower garlands, incense, and lamps (Younger 1993: 83). The town of Śrirangam became a municipality in 1871.

Religious life also influenced the town's internal economy. Festivals, processions, and fairs generated trade and markets. Structures like colonnades and areas around temple gateways served and still serve as market centres for buying and selling merchandise (Auboyer 1968: 21–22; Younger 1993: 83–85). In addition to the economic ramifications of religious urbanism in a temple town, there are symbolic aspects of sacrality that influenced urban planning and spatial layout. Since the temple represented the nucleus, the temple square was the temple's sacred and administrative space.

Like other temple towns in South India, the spatial layout of Śrirangam is also influenced by the *mandala* concept of aligning the universe with the cosmic space in the form of concentric geometrical squares (Michell 1993:

13–17). Such a concept, superimposing sacred upon urban space, creates a metaphysical link between temple and town (Michell 1993: 17). Religious rites like circumambulation by the devotees and the ritual procession of the divinities not only within the temple proper but also in the town charge the urban space with symbolic meaning and influence its conception (Śivaraman 2011: 16–18). Circumambulation orders the movement of people and deities through the streets, forging a link between the temple that stands at the centre of the town, its urban configuration, lesser shrines in the suburbs, and sometimes even sacred sites in the surrounding countryside (Michell 1993: 14–17). Thus, the physical town itself, the outskirts, and the countryside with all their sacred and secular constituents are a part of the sacred territory united through the *mandala* concept with the temple at its centre. Despite changes in the urban planning and layout of streets in Śrirangam today, the *mandala* concept and the circumambulatory route cut across these formal and physical developments and often influence them. It is a challenge for the modern town planners of Śrirangam to complement and harmonize the traditional religious model with contemporary urban needs (Michell 1993: 13–17; Śivaraman 2011: 16–18). In addition to devotees visiting from all over the country, Śrirangam is home to a large working population that commutes to Tiruchchirapalli everyday: its vibrant economy provides them with modern urban amenities.

There are other temple centres dedicated to Viṣṇu within the island town and major sacred sites along the banks of Kaveri, such as the Mariamman Koyil at Samayampuram (approximately 16 kilometres distant) and the Jambukeshvaram temple at Tiruvanaikkaval, which also influenced the growth of Śrirangam as an urban centre. However, a study of the larger urbanization process involving multiple temple centres is beyond the present scope of this chapter. Focusing primarily on urban developments around the single cultic focus of the Ranganathasvami temple, this chapter traces its role in diffusing religious ideas and Śrivaiṣṇava community identities, as well as the societal and political aspects of urbanism manifested in its character and settlement patterns.

II: Religious conflicts and urban conformations: The town of Śrirangam from the thirteenth to seventeenth century CE

Hindu-Muslim conflict and urban syncretism?

Next to the sanctum sanctorum of the god Ranganatha, the presiding deity in the temple in the Arjuna *mandapa* (pavilion), there is a painting of one of the consorts of the god, Tulukka Nacchiyar. As the name suggests, she was a Muslim/Turkish princess who became the divine consort of Lord Ranganatha.[6] The presence of a Muslim goddess in a Hindu temple has caused many to admire what is commonly perceived as the composite culture of Śrirangam and syncretic outlook of the Śrivaiṣṇava community. Tulukka Nacchiyar is identified as the Turkish princess who came from Delhi in

pursuit of the god with whom she had fallen in love. Against the backdrop of the invasions of the Delhi Sultans, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughlaq in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the travails of the princess in her journey from Delhi to Śrirangam are interpreted as her devotion (*bhakti)* towards Ranganatha.[7]

The story is often seen as a resolution of Hindu-Muslim tension through accommodation in the Hindu temple. Scholars usually understand the establishment of the shrine of Tulukka Nacchiyar, as well as the annual festival celebrating the ritual marriage (*kalyana utsavam*) of Ranganatha with Nacchiyar, as an attempt to integrate the Muslim population of Śrirangam and nearby seaport towns comprising Arab settlements, with the temple (Jagannathan 2015: 219–221). In addition, Ranganatha receives a daily offering of *rotis* (wheat bread, in contrast to the conventional rice meal) and even wears coloured *lungis* (not the white cloth worn by Hindus) to please the Muslim princess. Manu Pillai writes (see also Davis 1997: 129–137; Davis 2004; Pillai 2018b),

> Though it seems unlikely that a Tughluq princess actually came to the south head over heels in love with a deity, could it have been that there was a Muslim woman instrumental in having idols released from Delhi? Or is it, as Davis suggests, a 'counter-epic' where the roles are reversed: Instead of a Muslim king chasing after Hindu princesses, we have a Muslim princess besotted with the Hindu divine. By accepting the concept of the Thulukka Nachiyar, within the temple, was a space created to locate the newcomer Muslim within the world of the orthodox Hindu? The truth might lie in a combination of these possibilities, but we can be sure that it is a colourful, revealing narrative with a splendid cast, telling us once again that while there were moments of crisis between India's faiths, legend and myth allowed them to see eye to eye and move on to fresh ground—a lesson we would be wise to remember in our own contentious times.
>
> (Pillai 2018a)

Were the accommodation and negotiation so exceptional as we would like to think today? Was it a resolution of the Hindu-Muslim religious conflict which transformed the urban culture of Śrirangam, gradually developing as an important trading centre as it provided space to the growing Muslim merchant population from the fourteenth century onwards?

The *Koil Olugu*, the temple chronicle, narrates the invasion of the Tulukkan or Turkish sultan, also called Dilliśvara (king of Delhi), who ransacked the Śrirangam town and temple, carrying away the loot that included the portable festival image (*utsava murti*) of the god Ranganatha. Consequently, we are informed that the festivals were suspended, and the town and temple had a desolate look.[8] The *Olugu* then narrates the devotion of a woman who desires to restore the temple festivals and follows the sultan's army incognito to Delhi to discover the festival image in the custody of the sultan's daughter, who treats it like her lover. The woman immediately returns to Śrirangam and informs the

temple officials, who thereafter set out for Delhi to recover the idol and prevail upon the sultan to return it. As they commence their return journey, the princess, delirious with grief at the loss of her lover, follows the temple retinue (*Koil Olugu*: 24–33). Seeing her agony, the king orders his soldiers to accompany the princess. Thereafter, the *Olugu* narrates an adventurous tale of the princess and soldiers in hot pursuit of the temple officials and servants, who finally reach Śrīrangam via Tirupati, another Śrīvaiṣṇava sacred centre. The image is reinstated in the temple so that the festivals can resume, and the *Olugu* narrative ends with the information that a shrine was constructed for the sultani next to the sanctum sanctorum. Significantly, the shrine is located on the path through which the procession of the devotees passes during festivals.[9]

An inscription dated to 1371 CE on the walls of the second enclosure of the temple records that Gopanna, the general of the Vijayanagara king, Kampana, carried 'the image of Ranganatha from Tirupati to Chenji, his capital and after defeating the Muslims restored the image to Śrīrangam and had it installed there with Lakshmi and Bhudevi, the consorts of the Lord' (*South Indian Inscriptions*, XXIV:286). Sometime later in 1373 CE, inscriptions tell us that the *mahamantri* (minister) of the king restored some lands to the temple at Śrīrangam, converting some into pasture lands with well-marked boundaries, indicating a partial reinstatement of the order disrupted by the Tughlaqi invasions (ibid. XXIV: 287, 288).

While it is a possibility that invasions of the Delhi Sultanate in the fourteenth century CE may have temporarily disrupted the worship in the temple at Śrīrangam, the truth of the events described in the *Olugu* regarding temple destruction; looting of the temple treasures, especially the festival image; and, finally, the reinstallation of the festival image as a shrine in the temple is difficult to assess. After all, the *Olugu*, written and compiled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was recording incidents that took place almost 200–300 years ago.

These events were also documented in the early Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies written in the thirteenth and fourteenth century CE, just around or even later than the invasions of the Delhi Sultanate. However, in these hagiographies, interestingly, it was not the Ranganathasvami temple at Śrīrangam that the Turks attacked, ransacked, and looted, taking away the image among other valuables. Rather, the target of the attack in these hagiographical narratives was the Narayanasvami temple at Melkote, in Karnataka, almost 240 miles north-west of Śrīrangam (Dutta 2003: 157–184; 2014a: 150–160). Further, the temple servants of Śrīrangam were not the heroes in these texts. Ramanuja, the most important leader of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community was the saviour of the festival image. It is important to note that while Ramanuja lived from c.1017–1137 CE, the invasions of Alauddin Khalji took place between 1296 CE and 1310 CE, and the next set of northern Turkish invasions were by Muhammad bin Tughlaq in the fourteenth century. Under no circumstances could the invasions have preceded Ramanuja or taken place during his lifetime. This was clearly the hagiographers' sleight of hand in putting together otherwise anachronistic events.

If one examines the broader textual world of medieval and early modern South India one finds that 'Turkish' invasions were emerging as significant literary tropes in various political narratives. In these narratives, the heroes were chiefs and petty rulers who were shown to be inflicting ignominious defeat upon the Delhi sultans referred to as 'Yavanas', 'Tulukkas', and 'Turushkas'. Commissioned by various political groups aspiring for power against the background of an unstable political situation in South India in the thirteenth century, the invasion motif was a means of portraying a successful dominant ideology which buttressed the defeat of a powerful enemy and the establishment of a political and moral order, especially restoring the temple calendar (Chattopadhyaya 1998; Talbot 1995; Wagoner 1996). The political narratives composed in the reign of the rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire, established during this period, also used this trope (Davis 1997: 115–123; Dutta 2003: 172–175). Thereafter, this motif persisted in the political narratives of various aspirant ruling groups of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who commissioned such texts in their eagerness to show themselves as legitimate successors of the Vijayanagara Empire (see Dutta 2003: 172–175; Talbot 1995, 2000; Wagoner 2000).

The hagiographies and temple chronicles, including the *Koil Olugu*, thus drew upon these political narratives, recasting the events within the devotional frame of the Śrivaiṣṇava community. By projecting a shared past when both rulers and Śrivaiṣṇavas had to confront a common enemy (Tulukkas, king of Delhi), the texts sought patronage through the impression of a collective historical experience. Narratives associated with Ramanuja and his heroism became the template for hagiographies of subsequent Śrivaiṣṇava leaders, especially preceptors of various sectarian affiliations. Śrivaiṣṇava sectarian hagiographies, especially between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, located their respective leaders in these narratives, thus forging a genealogical bond of continuity with Ramanuja. This was an important means of legitimizing claims over temple resources, disciples, and patronage, where different spiritual preceptors claimed to be legitimate successors of Ramanuja. However, in none of the instances was there any reference to the Muslim goddess, Tulukka Nacchiyar (Dutta 2003: 175; 2004: 159–160).[10]

How then does one understand the Tulukka Nacchiyar story? According to one view, the textual delineation of Muslims in the Tulukka Nacchiyar story at Śrirangam was not a hagiographical justification for incorporating different social groups in the wider ritual structure of the temple as has sometimes been contended (Jagannathan 2015: 217–219). Rather, it is asserted that the location of the Tulukka Nacchiyar shrine indicates that in the course of the expansion of the temple complex 'an area, which might have been sacred to local Muslims – perhaps a grave shrine of a local saint of a type common throughout the sub-continent' was appropriated and accorded a ritual space within the complex (ibid. 220). The Tulukka Nacchiyar narrative supposedly legitimized this expansion, and the shrine's inclusion alleviated the local tensions generated by the extension (ibid. 217–221).

This argument seems persuasive in the light of increasing settlements of Arab traders in and around Kannanur, an important trading centre on the upper Kaveri bank, north-west of Śrirangam. However, after examining the areas of circulation of the Tulukka Nacchiyar story, one realizes that the story had a much wider pan-regional context, with ramifications for the urban growth of Śrirangam. The story appears in the temple chronicles of Melkote and Vandiyur near Madurai (76 miles south of Śrirangam). In the case of Vandiyur, the local god, a form of Viṣṇu, is so impressed with Nacchiyar's unflinching devotion to the festival image at Śrirangam that he requests a replica for his own temple. The story also appears in the folk narratives of Melkote and Tirupati (108 miles north of Śrirangam) in which Tulukka Nacchiyar is a local Muslim tribal princess.[11] Local pastoralists, landed chiefs, traders, and agriculturists emerged as important warrior and occupational groups, and they were patronized by various rulers, including the Vijayanagara kings. Many of these warrior communities were Muslims with their respective devotional cults, while others were followers of the autochthonous goddess cult. Thus the marriage of a local Muslim princess to the presiding god forged a cultic kinship between various local traditions, integrating various warrior lineages. This may explain the silence about the Turkish invasions from Delhi and temple looting in these regional stories of Tulukka Nacchiyar, which focus instead in great detail on the romance and courtship of the presiding god with the local tribal princess.

It should be noted that Śrirangam, Melkote, Vandiyur, and Tirupati were part of the Śrivaiṣṇava pilgrimage network, and several prominent Śrivaiṣṇava leaders travelled in these areas and interacted with their warrior and occupational groups, drawing them to Śrirangam, which was emerging as the centre of the Śrivaiṣṇava community. Besides, warrior groups located in dry upland areas of Melkote, Tirpuati, and Vandiyur were also attracted to the fertile riverine area of Śrirangam. This traffic was further escalated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when ruling dynasties of the Hoysalas from Karnataka in the north, Pandyas from Madurai in the south, and, finally, the Vijayanagara dynasty from the northern parts of Karnataka occupied Śrirangam, integrating it politically with these areas where the Tulukka Nacchiyar story already prevailed.

Thus Śrirangam emerged as the arena in temple chronicles like the *Koil Olugu*. The *Olugu* combined the political narratives and the Śrivaiṣṇava hagiographic traditions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that highlighted the Turkish invasions (the former continuing even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) with local traditions from Melkote, Vandiyur, and Tirupati to choose Śrirangam over Melkote as the theatre of action. This ensured patronage from diverse political groups and gave the honourable role of saviours to the community of devotees who were mostly tribal groups of the Irulas and Kodavars and marginalized occupational castes, such as temple singers, barbers, and washermen. In the narrative, they received honours and titles since they comprised the temple retinue and residents at Tirupati, where the idol was temporarily hidden from the sultan's army before being reinstated at Śrirangam.

Śrivaiṣṇava community and urban configurations

Therefore, it is not Hindu-Muslim religious conflict that lies behind the Tulukka Nacchiyar shrine at Śrirangam, which does not have a large Muslim population anyway. Rather, the expansion of the sphere of religious interaction and urban social and political contexts in Śrirangam drew people from other regions and affected its urban configuration. Inscriptions recorded in various languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi reveal Śrirangam's diverse demographic composition, with the temple and its town becoming loci of power and authority. Ruling dynasties such as the Pandyas, the Hoysalas, and the Vijayanagara rulers and generals instituted grants and inscriptions describing their genealogies, victories, and military achievements. Various political groups instituted services in the temple in their names, granting land and gold to the temple for agriculture, rituals and festivals, and financing architectural additions to both temple and town.

Consequently, settlement patterns underwent changes, with new villages being created. Numerous inscriptions record land grants for house sites and colonies not only in the town itself but also in areas that served to expand the hinterland. Flower gardens and paths, especially to the river Kaveri, were laid down. Epigraphical evidence from the tenth century onwards shows that the urban growth of Śrirangam was dependent on the continuous expansion of its rural hinterland, and the town was not a mere parasite extracting surplus from the countryside; rather, there were economic, as well as social, exchanges between the two, each influencing the other. Initially, temple management was vested with one group of officials, but from the twelfth–thirteenth centuries onwards, more groups, including large numbers of non-brahmanas, came to be involved, and the social base of the temple was also simultaneously broadened. Further, such an expanded administrative rearrangement became inevitable as both town and the temple depended on support from the hinterland for their respective growth in subsequent centuries (Dutta 2014b: 457–478).

The allegiance of various local groups thus enabled the Ranganathasvami temple to generate diverse economic activities that were critical to its urbanization. The growing hinterland brought together peasants, artisans, and craftsmen and incorporated them through a ritual ranking within the temple site. The hierarchical arrangement of Śrirangam's urban space is evident in the town's layout, where the religious and political elites were and are still closer to the temple, with quarters within the first four walls and the lower caste groups, such as artisans, craftsmen, and temple servants, having houses further away from the temple within the three outer walls.

These developments influenced the Śrivaiṣṇava community's ideology. Clearly, the Śrivaiṣṇava religious leaders who were brahmanas (the highest caste) had important roles in the temple administration. But inscriptions relate an instance of misappropriation of funds in the temple, after which a public enquiry was instituted by the Śrivaiṣṇava temple administration, which found that ten of the temple executives had colluded with the

contractor to expend cash, paddy, and gold and misappropriate the rights of cultivation. Consequently, worship in the temple almost stopped. Finally, at the behest of the king, on the occasion of the festival, the temple revenue was restored, and the Śrivaiṣṇavas selected new executives who would hold positions by rotation for not more than one year (*South Indian Inscriptions*, XXIV: 192).

But the community also faced challenges, resulting in it being marginalized, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when a committee constituted by the king appointed an ascetic (*sanyasin*) from a region outside Śrirangam to look after the variously situated properties of the temple, with provisions made for his maintenance. There is also a mention of the appointment of guards ('armed Vēḷaikkāṟas') for the safety of this ascetic (ibid. XXIV: 257). This relegated the Śrivaiṣṇavas to the background, making the leaders realize that they should have an independent clientele that would give them better bargaining power.

The Śrivaiṣṇava ideologues then arranged to introduce the singing of the entire corpus of the Tamil hymns of the Alvars, some of whom were non-brahmanas, in the temple, accompanied by an elaborate ten-day festival in the town. These Tamil hymns, called the Dravida Veda, were thus put on par with the Sanskrit Vedas. Devotion expressed in Tamil, the regional language, had a wider appeal than Sanskrit, considered the language of the elites. Thus, the tradition of the dual Vedas or *ubhaya vedanta* was evolved, representing a broader and more inclusive social base (Dutta 2003: 161–163; Venkatachari 1978: 30–33). For the first time, in the texts of the community, authored by Śrivaiṣṇava ideologues attached to temples and monastic organizations, we have the notion of a Śrivaiṣṇava community identity that does not privilege caste status and can become the focus of collective consciousness. The ideology of *ubhaya vedanta* provided a space for accommodating large numbers of non-brahmanas, called the Sattada Śrivaiṣṇavas, into the temple activities. Thus the evolution of a broad-based ideology coincided with the emergence of new social and political groups in search of new avenues for legitimation and consolidation. The Śrivaiṣṇavas gained by extending patronage to them, an innovation attributed to Ramanuja, whose reforms are narrated in detail in the *Koil Olugu* (ed. cit: 41–112). Śrirangam thus acquired a complex and stratified urban character and became a major pilgrimage centre for the Śrivaiṣṇava community.

This patronage of diverse sections and gifts of paddy, land, gold, and livestock created several competing groups within the Śrivaiṣṇava community. Families of religious leaders, such as the Uttama Nambis and Kandadais, and *mathas*, monastic institutions with heads or *mathadhipatis* such as Śriranganarayana Jiyar, competed with each other for resources and rights within the temples and commanded a respectable following. Two trends emerged in the urban life of Śrirangam. Firstly, the relationship between the sectarian leaders and new political groups determined the power equations in the town, as these competing groups also established parallel institutions while holding rights in the temples (Appadurai 1981: 63–104). Secondly,

Śrirangam's urban life was characterized by the crystallization and assertion of caste identities. The non-brahmana Sattada Śrivaiṣṇavas, with their relatively lower caste status, became influential not only in the temple services but also in feeding houses where pilgrims were served food (Lester 1994: 39–53; Stein 2004: 81–101)

In such an environment, conflict between these competing religious groups was inevitable. These groups and their followers established institutions that dotted the urban configuration with monasteries controlled by the *jiyars*, meal-serving centres called *Ramanujakutams* established and controlled by the Kandadai family, and independent household structures controlled by the Uttama Nambis. All of these received extensive land grants, held rights in the temple in their capacity as administrative officials, and were themselves donors of land and gold. We also find numerous festivals instituted in their names, while the leaders had significant roles in other temple festivals.

In fact, festivals played an important role in shaping the social and spatial disposition of this growing, temple-centric urban site. The town was designed in many ways to accommodate festivals old and new.

> [The] processions would take place at the outermost enclosure that surrounded the city to facilitate all the inhabitants (including the lower castes) in the precincts of the town and sometimes even the hinterland, to get a glimpse of the supreme presiding deity.
>
> (Śivaraman 2011: 17)

The streets functioned primarily as circumambulatory paths for the procession, comprising chariot cars, temple retinue, and ordinary people or as axial streets leading from and to the temple, riverbeds and riverfronts, tanks, flower gardens, coconut groves, and various villages, which were drawn into the ambit of festival celebrations, attributing sacred meanings even to the most mundane site. Pillared pavilions *(mandapams)* were constructed at strategic street locations, especially in the last three outer walled enclosures, as well as in the nearby villages. The axial streets through which the processions passed were lined with pavilions, providing halting stages for the festival image, where people from nearby areas could collect for rituals to be performed. At different points on the town's streets, as well as in the nearby villages, there were small shrines that had a symbolic and sacred connection with the temple. (Śivaraman 2011: 16–20) In this way, the hinterland, town, and temple were connected to each other and, finally, to the presiding deity, Lord Ranganatha, who was confirmed as proprietor of all these areas, with the festivals providing an occasion for him to symbolically inspect 'His' lands (Śivaraman 2011: 20). At these moments of dispersed worship and celebration, the Śrivaiṣṇava leaders exhibited spatial control depending upon their bargaining power and influence. These pavilions constituted spaces where the festival image, embodying the presiding deity, honoured the donors of land, property, gold, and livestock:

> The open space, as part of the street network, changes in volume and character as one continuously moves from the periphery to the temple. These changes are related to the performance of certain functions at the various *mandapams* and pillared pavilions which are spaces of religious congregations, festivals etc. The scale and dimensions of the streets shrink as one moves to the main temple. The ramparts and the *gopurams* as well as the streets all reflect this inward movement to the temple which itself is very low. Thus the design concept in Śrirangam is in complete contrast to either a medieval European town or to contemporary towns where the core is densely built up and dominates the rest of the city.
>
> (Ghosh and Mago 1974: 6)

In one instance, the procession, taken out during an annual festival, *Panguni Uttiram*, became an occasion for boundary disputes between the Vaiṣṇava temple of Ranganantha and the Śaiva temple of Tiruvannaikaval/Jambukeshvaram at Śrirangam. There was an imaginary boundary line between the two temples, running from the northern side near the river Kaveri to the southern side near the river Kollidam. The festival procession from the Vaiṣṇava temple customarily travelled north-south, from Kaveri to Kollidam. On one occasion, the Śaiva temple administration objected, and this escalated into a bitter dispute. Finally, at the instance of the Uttamanambis and the Vijayanagara king, the dispute was resolved by laying down stones to mark the boundary. Thereafter the Śaiva temple trustees requested passage for their cattle, promising a piece of land in exchange. Thus a fluid boundary became fixed, influencing the urban landscape with spatial demarcations of religious identities (*Koil Olugu*: 139–141).

From the end of the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, Śrirangam became a part of Trichinopoly (Tiruchchirapalli) politics, reflecting conflicts between the Carnatic rulers, especially Chanda Sahib, the Nawab of Arcot, the English and French East India Companies, Marathas, and rulers of Mysore. Śrirangam was an important base where British and French armies, in particular, would retreat to fortify themselves. Its seven concentric streets surrounded by walls resembling fortified ramparts and imposing gateways or *gopurams* made the island of Śrirangam a centre of important military operations during the Carnatic Wars in the eighteenth century (Aiyangar 1894: 14–17).

Śrivaiṣṇava sectarian conflicts: Śrirangam and urban homogeneity

In the nineteenth century, the British established their government in parts of South India, such as the Carnatic region, including Trichinopoly. Thereafter, they assumed control of all the temples, including the one at Śrirangam, replacing the older political powers and ruling dynasties. The entire property of the temple was attached, including gifts from visitors, rents from shops inside the boundary walls, and lands adjacent to the town. Temple offices were auctioned to the highest bidders – a practice discontinued only after

complaints from various quarters (Aiyangar 1894: 16). Thus, the traditional indigenous structure was gradually eroded: as Appadurai says, 'These departures from the previous indigenous structure of relationships created tensions and dialectical pressures that altered temple politics in crucial respects' (Appadurai 1981: 230). This may have generated the need for distinct sectarian, cross-regional identities based on common interests. The various Śrivaiṣṇava sects in the temple that were ideologically oriented towards the Sanskritic Vedic traditions came to be identified as the Vadakalais (northerners), while those who identified with the Tamil tradition were called the Tenkalais (southerners). The duality of the Sanskrit and the Tamil traditions, which had earlier provided the ideological underpinning for different sectarian identities, had always existed. Despite integrating the two within the paradigm of the *ubhaya vedanta* philosophy as discussed earlier, the combination remained a somewhat uneasy one. Before the eighteenth century, the contradictions within Śrivaiṣṇava philosophy and community were articulated at the level of intellectual and theological disputes; subsequently, the Sanskritic and Tamil alignments gradually crystallized into strong subsects. The coming of the British and their interactions with religious institutions led to the complete reworking of power relations and produced a schism in the Śrivaiṣṇava community.

In the colonial period, this schism involved a series of disputes between the Vadakalais and Tenkalais over temple administration. In settlement of a dispute, the colonial administration issued a court order in 1808 that the temple, its functionaries, rituals, festivals, and other activities would be Tenkalai in affiliation. Thus, the presiding deity, with all the shrines, utensils, temple walls, town walls, streets, shops, and houses, including those of the Vadakalais, would carry the Tenkalai mark. Śrirangam's history was attributed with Tenkalai characteristics from antiquity, thus projecting the Vadakalais as interlopers, intruders, and trespassers. The Vadakalais were prohibited from celebrating their own rituals or playing a prominent role in the festivals, any interference carrying the severest penalties, including banishment from the town.[12] In 1837, an order gave the Tenkalais sole access to temple control. However, in 1841, the East India Company's Court of Directors withdrew government interference from temple administration in the Madras Presidency, leaving it to the temple trustees, who would be legally accountable. With respect to the Śrirangam temple, the government decided in 1842 that temple management would be vested with the traditional custodians, in this case the Tenkalai, while the temple priests or *archakas* being Vadakalais and 'ineligible' would lose all their rights (Aiyangar 1894: 14–17). Throughout the colonial period, such bitter disputes between the Vadakalais and Tenkalais became a persistent part of the urban life of Śrirangam.

Thus, religion and religious ideology, sacred status, and local ecology generated political and economic processes that led to the growth of Śrirangam as an urban site. Post-fourteenth-century Śrirangam was a major pilgrimage town, bringing together different social groups within the framework of Śrivaiṣṇavism but also producing schismatic rifts between them. Settlement

patterns were determined by the dominant presence of the sacred centre, the temple itself, which influenced the treatment of urban spatiality and the expansion of the hinterland. Over time, the interlinkage between economic and religious aspects influenced urban morphology, lending a certain dynamism to the production of space in the totality of the temple town of Śrirangam. The temple's wealth attracted pillagers from the north, but the expansion and settlement of the hinterland were equally responsible for the incorporation of different castes, tribes, and religious groups within the urban centre, influencing both temple and town with their customs and religiosities. This was reflected in the ever-expanding temple pantheon of divinities and the administrative and ritual spaces allotted to these groups. Assimilation, accommodation, and even historical conflict form the core of a dynamic relationship between religion and urbanism in Śrirangam, as this chapter has tried to show.

Notes

1 Most studies of Śrirangam are on linear histories, art, architecture, and technical planning. See, e.g. Rao, 1967, 1976; Auboyer, 1968; Ghosh and Mago, 1974; Gopalakrishnan and Srinivas, 2014; Śivaraman, 2011.
2 On South Indian temple towns see Heitzman, 1987, 2001; Champakalakshmi, 1996; George Michell, 1993.
3 The following sources were analyzed: Narasimhaswami, ed. 1982. *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. XXIV; Ayyangar, 1979, ed. *Piṉpaḻagiya Perumāḻjīyaruḷiya Āṟayirappaḍi Guruparamparāprabhāvam*; Rao, ed. *Kōïl Oḷugu*, 1961; Aiyangar, 1894, *A Second Collection of the Papers Relating to Sri Ranganathasvami Temple*.
4 *Gopurams*, decorated with carved, painted mythological figures dominate the viewscape of all temple towns including Śrirangam (see Gopalakrishnan and Srinivas 2014).
5 The UNESCO world heritage site proposal states: 'Sri Ranganathasvamy Temple the largest Functioning Temple in the World…is often found ranked amongst the largest religious complexes of the world, including the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borobodur in Indonesia, Machu Picchu in Peru and the Vatican City'. https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5894/
6 Tulukka (literally, Turk) is used for Muslims in Tamil parlance today; Nacchiyar (girl) refers to the goddess here.
7 There were two sets of forays into south India by the rulers of Delhi. The first set of invasions was from c.1296 CE onwards, when Alauddin Khalji (c.1296–1314 CE) conducted successful expeditions against the Yadavas of Devagiri (Maharashtra), Kakatiyas of Warangal (Andhra Pradesh), Hoysalas of Dvarasamudra (Karnataka), and the Pandyas of Madurai (Tamil Nadu). Since their main motive was plunder, these states were not annexed but were reduced to a tributary status. Governance of the distant south from Delhi was considered politically imprudent. The second set of invasions took place during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq (c.1324–1351 CE). Motivated by imperialist desires of expansion and control, these invasions proved to be counterproductive for the sultan as control of the south could not withstand the pressure of constant rebellions by local chiefs and officials. Ultimately, the Sultanate was routed, and two important polities established their control – viz., the Vijayanagara kingdom with its capital at Hampi (Karnataka) and the Bahmani kingdom with its capital at Gulbarga, both in the Deccan region.
8 The deities cannot be removed from the temples. During festivals, it is believed that the gods come out from their abodes (the temples) and go around the town;

hence, portable images are made (possibly different in name and appearance), consecrated, and taken around in a huge procession. This marks an important event in the festivities and highlights the accessibility of the gods.

9 According to *Koil Olugu*, p. 31: 'under the commands of the Perumal (presiding deity), a room was erected within the procession path, in the northwestern corner of the Rajamahendran enclosure, wherein the picture of the sultani, the daughter of the king of Delhi was painted and installed. Every dawn as happened in Delhi, the divine food of wheat bread, sweet dal (lentils) and kiccadi (lentil and rice) were offered to the Perumal and Bhumi or Bibi Nacciyar or Sandu Nacciyar for which offering two villages in Koranadu were granted by Rajamahendran Cola'.

10 For instance, the Vadakalai hagiographies refer to their guru Vedantadeśika's pilgrimage to all sacred centres, including the northern sites. His escape to Mysore and Melkote following the Turkish invasions from the north are reminiscent of Ramanuja's sojourns. Similarly, the Tenkalai hagiographies give a lengthy account of the Turkish invasions and the flight of Pillai Lokacharya, the Tenkalai leader, from Śrirangam to Melkote and Mysore with the idol of Ranganatha but dying on the way because of old age and infirmity. Thereafter, the followers continued with their flight and carried the idol to Tirumala-Tirupati, successfully reinstalling it in Śrirangam after peace was established

11 In Tirupati, she is the cultic goddess of the Dudhekula clan of local Muslim cotton carders. They are Telugu speaking and combine 'Hindu domestic rituals and Muslim cult veneration' in their religious beliefs. See Bayly 1992: 31–68; Hiltebeitel 2001: 50–51 and 306–316.

12 28 April 1808 – Decree in the O.S. No.130 of 1808 establishing Tengalai rights and Privileges. Original Suit No.130 of 1808 of the Zilla Court of Tirchinopoly.

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3   Hazrat-i-Dehli

Chishti Sufism and the making of the cosmopolitan character of the city of Delhi

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This chapter is part of my long-standing interest in the historic city of Delhi as an important Sufi centre, its heterogeneous and cosmopolitan culture, and its status as an important seat of political power, capital, or *darul khilafat*. Critical to all these was the early arrival of the Sufis of the Chishti order who shaped the pluralistic character of the Sultanate polity, an important feature of the political system in the country down to the present. The city acquired the status of the foremost centre of Islam at a time when the Mongol upsurge had led to the destruction of all the great Islamic cities in Central Asia, Iran, and the Middle East, including Samarqand, Bukhara, and Baghdad. Indeed, Delhi served as a refuge to a host of displaced immigrants who brought with them a variety of religious and intellectual traditions, leading to contestations among various claimants to power and authority. Yet it was the liberal and accommodative Chishtis who endowed Delhi's culture with a cosmopolitan character, preventing it from taking a monolithic shape. Even as institutionalized and orthodox (*ba-sha'ra*) Chishtis distanced themselves from, and even opposed, the extremist agenda of giving the option of Islam or death to non-Muslims, they ensured that the interests of Islam and Muslims were safeguarded. Though the urban conglomerate of Delhi remained the bastion of Muslim power for close to six centuries and its landscape is dotted with mosques, *madrasas* (Islamic seminaries), and *dargahs* (shrines or tombs) of the Sufis, the exclusionist, juridical interpretation of the *shari'a* (Muslim laws) was set aside in favour of the more inclusive approach to Islam practiced and propagated by the Chishti Sufis. This inclusive character of the city also shaped the pluralistic and broad-based polity of the country of India we have known since the thirteenth century.

Thus, we are concerned here with what is cherished as the best in India's inclusive political culture, devotional practices showing the way for peaceful coexistence and remarkable achievements in the cultural arena, whether in terms of literary excellence or exquisite examples of built heritage dotting the landscape. These and several other crucial markers of urbanity: such as a high cultural value set on elegance and fashion, even in heterogeneous modes, respect for the different and the unfamiliar in a mixed urban population, and a civic emphasis on infrastructure development and institution-building, despite the dirty underbelly of deprivation and depravity, have made Delhi

the city that has come down to us from medieval times. Build and rebuild, rather than destroy, is the lesson from the past, from which we must learn for a better tomorrow. The careers and contributions of Chishti Sufis have a significant role in the making of the pluralistic culture in which diversity can peacefully coexist. Through their practices, Sufis were able to show the tolerant and inclusive aspect of Islam, part of a religious culture and history which tends to get ignored in the current emphasis on Islamic societies breeding terror and hatred (for an important general history of the significance of Chishti tradition across centuries, see Ernst and Lawrence 2002).

In their misplaced understanding of the emerging Sultanate as an Islamic state, the *ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) wanted Sultan Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish (ruled CE 1211–1236) to confront the Hindus of the capital city (*dar-ul-khilafa*) of Delhi with the alternatives of death or conversion to Islam. In a measure that speaks of the sultan's attempts at rapprochement with non-Muslims, Iltutmish rejected the *ulama*'s demand. The Turks had realized that it was difficult to rule a vast non-Muslim population through a strict adherence to a narrow interpretation of the *shari'at* or Islamic law as interpreted by jurists belonging to the Hanafi school. Instead, they evolved a broad, almost secular state law (*zawabit-i-mulki*) with public protestation of respect to Muslim divines and their institutions, later articulated in *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* by Ziya-ud-Din Barani, an influential noble and prominent disciple of the Chishti saint Hazrat Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Auliya (see *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* 1972; for the saint's life, see Nizami 1991a; for Barani's political ideas, see Aquil 2017a, Ch. 3).

The Muslim population of the city was increasing rapidly, already in the early decades of the thirteenth century. Significantly enough, the enthronement of Qutb-ud-Din Aybak (ruled 1206–1210) coincided with the election of Genghis Khan as the great leader of the Mongol hordes. The advent of the Mongols led to large-scale devastation in Central and West Asia in the next 50 years. Major centres of Islam such as Bukhara and Baghdad were sacked. Delhi was the only place where Muslims could escape the wrath of the Tartars. Islam prospered in Delhi with the name of the caliph still being mentioned in the *khutba* (Friday sermons) and the *sikka* (coins). A number of Sufi saints also came to settle in and around Delhi. The Qutb complex and the fast-expanding Mehrauli area constituted a conspicuous intersection of the city's political and sacred geographies. No wonder over the course of time the capital acquired the venerable epithet of 'Hazrat-i-Dehli'!

Sufi institutions such as the *khanqah* (hospice) and the *dargah* (shrine) have indeed contributed a great deal to the making of Delhi's harmonious culture since the early decades of the thirteenth century. In particular, the arrival of the Sufis of the Chishti order (*silsila*) ensured that force and violence were not used for converting the general population to Islam. While the Islamic orthodoxy (identified here as a rigid commitment to Hanafite Sunni Islam propounded by sections of the *ulama* or theologians) strove for the total annihilation of the *kafirs* (infidels), the Sufis' belief in tolerance and universal brotherhood proved to be more appealing to the early sultans. The rulers

themselves disliked the arrogance of the *ulama* and felt that the Sufis' position on such questions as the treatment to be meted out to Hindus and generally on matters related to *shari'at* was more correct. Delhi's multicultural and mutlireligious culture was thus promoted by political authority. Controversial religious issues, which had the potential to tear the pluralistic fabric of the city apart, did erupt in the public arena occasionally, but in general, the effort was to accommodate difference through a cautiously liberal policy.

In a way, it augured well for Delhi's history that the earliest Muslim to have been born in the city after the Turkish conquest went on to be a Chishti Sufi of considerable reputation for syncretistic proclivities. Sheikh Hamid-ud-Din Nagauri (died 1274) was a disciple and *khalifa* (spiritual successor) of none other than the great Khwaja Gharib Nawaz Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri (died 1236). Mu'in-ud-Din, in turn, had been reportedly directed by Prophet Muhammad in a dream while in Medina to go to Hindustan. The Khwaja's arrival coincided with the conquest by the Turks. The Sufi tradition claims that Mu'in-ud-Din had prophesied Shahab-ud-Din Ghuri's victory in the second battle of Tarain in 1192. The saint is quoted as saying in the much-celebrated, mid-fourteenth-century *tazkira*, a collection of biographies of mainly Chishti Sufis titled *Siyar-ul-Auliya* (1978: 56–57) that we have seized Pithaura (or Prithviraj) alive and handed him over to the army of Islam (*pithaura ra zinde giraftim wa dadim be lashkar-i-islam*). The Chauhan ruler was said to be harassing the sheikh and his disciples at Ajmer. The sheikh's charisma won him a large following and converts, and his *khalifas* spread in different directions. Hamid-ud-Din, referred to earlier, went to live in a village near Nagaur. He cultivated a small plot of land, became a vegetarian, and led a life conforming to the rural Indian environment (I. Faruqi 1963).

Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti chose the more sophisticated Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (died 1236) for the cosmopolitan *wilayat* (spiritual territory) of Delhi. Bakhtiyar Kaki was born at Ush, located on the bank of the Jaxartes in Central Asia. He met Mu'in-ud-Din in Baghdad and became his disciple. He followed his *pir* (preceptor) Mu'in-ud-Din, also referred to in later Sufi sources as the 'Sultan of Hind', and reached Delhi during the reign of Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish. The sultan welcomed the sheikh and invited him to live in the city. Hesitant at first, he agreed to the ruler's request. Bakhtiyar Kaki, called so for his supposedly miraculous ability to produce *kak*, or bread, to sustain his family, had to compete for space in the spiritual geography of the city. Not to speak of the *ulama*, quite a few eminent Sufi sheikhs of various orders had come to settle there. Many of them had just arrived following the Mongol invasions in Central Asia and Iran. Bakhtiyar Kaki found his most powerful antagonist in Sheikhul Islam Najm-ud-Din Sughra, a Sufi of his own order. Najm-ud-Din and Bakhtiyar Kaki's *pir* Mu'in-ud-Din were disciples of the same sheikh, Khwaja Usman Harwani. Najm-ud-Din did not take kindly to the growing popularity of Kaki and his influence in political circles. Iltutmish himself was a devotee and, according to a later tradition, had become a *khalifa* or spiritual successor of the sheikh.

Seeking to prevent the tension between Najm-ud-Din and Bakhtiyar Kaki from escalating, Mu'in-ud-Din, who was on a visit to Delhi, asked his disciple to leave the place and accompany him to Ajmer. The news of the departure of the saints was perceived as a sign of calamity by the sultan and the people. They are reported to have followed the sheikhs for miles, crying and wailing. Touched by the grief of the ruler and the ruled alike, Mu'in-ud-Din allowed Bakhtiyar Kaki to remain in Delhi (*Siyar-ul-Auliya* 1978: 64–65). As a patron saint of the city, Kaki enjoyed prestige and authority and influenced the sultan's style of governance. It is related that once the Prophet appeared in dreams to both the Sufi and the sultan and indicated a particular spot for building a tank (Hauz-i-Shamsi) to overcome Delhi's water shortage.

The site of Hauz-i-Shamsi, along with the adjacent Auliya Masjid, Jahaz Mahal, and the Jharna (a picturesque spring garden), was significant not only as a source of water but also became a rendezvous of the spiritual and intellectual elite of the city. Much to the chagrin of the puritanical *ulama*, music assemblies (*mahfil-i-sama*, *qawwali*) were frequently organized, with the Chishti Sufi Bakhtiyar Kaki being the moving spirit behind them. The sheikh died in an ecstatic state induced by mystical poetry, listening to a particular couplet for over four days: *kushtagan-i khanjar-i taslim ra, har zaman as ghayb jani-i digar ast* (To the victims of the dagger of submission, there comes a new life from the unseen every moment). His funeral prayer (*namaz-i-janaza*) was to be led by the most pious person in the dominion. It was none other than Sultan Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish, celebrated in Sufi tradition as a mystic in the garb of a king. The saint was buried in Mehrauli at a lonely place he himself had chosen. The burial of a number of Sufis and rulers in the vicinity led to the emergence of a large necropolis over the centuries. The shrine complex and its neighbourhood had become very crowded by the early fourteenth century as recorded in *Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad*, the *malfuzat* (discourses) of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya (died 1325). Iltutmish survived the sheikh for only a few months and was interned in an elegant tomb of his own in the Qutb complex, not very far from the *dargah* of Bakhtiyar Kaki. Knowingly or otherwise, the sultan, whose authority as the head of the hierarchy of theologians and jurists was undisputed, followed his contemporary Abbasid caliph, al-Nasir's approach of using the prominent Sufi order as the official organization of popular Islam under the ruler (Arjomand 2004), combining the pietistic legality of the *ulama* with the spiritual adventures of the Chishti Sufis. No wonder, Sufi institutions such as *khanqahs* and *jama'atkhanas* flourished along with mosques and *madrasas*.

The weakness of the rulers and the supremacy of the nobles were two important features of the period following the death of Shams-ud-Din Iltutmish. Within a decade of his death, the nobles put four of his descendants on the throne and removed them at will. The next 20 years witnessed one of his slaves exterminating his dynasty by executing all the male members of his family. One name, which stands out in the short-lived Shamsi dynasty for commanding respect and authority, is that of Raziya Sultan – the only woman ruler of medieval Delhi with sovereign power. Iltutmish had nominated

Raziya as his heir apparent (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* 1970, I: 638). Disregarding her claim, the Turkish slave-officers had enthroned her stepbrother Rukn-ud-Din Firuz Shah as the sultan of Delhi. However, Rukn-ud-Din did not display much interest in matters of governance. Instead of the court, the reins of power were transferred to the harem from where his mother Shah Turkan controlled affairs of state. Raziya took advantage of the situation to forward her own claim to the throne. Putting on red garments, the symbolic garb of aggrieved persons seeking justice, she went to the Jama Masjid, the Qubbat-ul-Islam mosque of Qutb complex, at the time of the congregational prayer and complained to the people that Shah Turkan had planned to kill her. Invoking the name of her father, she appealed for protection. Sufficiently provoked, the people attacked the palace and Shah Turkan was seized. Raziya was placed on the throne. The nobles and the soldiers pledged their allegiance to her. Soon Rukn-ud-Din was imprisoned and put to death (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* 1970, I: 630–36).

Several important features marked Raziya's enthronement. The people of Delhi had played a key role in her accession, and their continued support was crucial for her survival. She is reported to have given her tenure as the sultan the form of a contract – with the people having the right to remove her if she failed in her duties. Further, her enthronement not only vindicated Iltutmish's choice but also exposed the limits of the power of Islamic orthodoxy. The elevation of a woman to royal authority was seemingly contradictory to Islamic practice. The legends (*sultan-i-azam jalal-ud-duniya wa ud-din*) inscribed on Raziya's coins highlighted the wrathful aspects of Muslim sovereignty. She also sought to gain legitimacy by reminding people, through her coins, that she was the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish. She may also have placated the *ulama* through patronage and endowments to the mosques and *madrasas* in the capital.

Minhaj-us-Siraj, leading theologian and chronicler, recorded in his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* that Raziya was a great sovereign, sagacious, just, beneficent, the patron of the learned, a dispenser of justice, and the cherisher of her subjects. Minhaj added that Raziya was endowed with all the attributes and qualifications necessary for a Muslim sultan. He, however, put a question mark on her right to rule by pointing out that since she did not attain the destiny, in her creation, of being computed among men, of what advantage were all these excellent qualifications unto her? (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* 1970, I: 637–38). It may be pointed out that her sex may have been a great disadvantage in that context but was not the main cause of her fall. With a view to assuming direct control of affairs, Raziya had thrown off the veil. She used to wear the *qaba* (cloak) and the *kulah* (cap) and ride out in public (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* 1970, I: 643). The Turks disliked her assertive role in administration. The opposition against her was organized on racial grounds. She had attempted to curb the power of the Turks by appointing non-Turks to important positions. In particular, the favour shown to the Abyssinian Jamal-ud-Din Yaqut proved to be her undoing. Condemnation of the manner in which the African slave Yaqut assisted Raziya in riding the horse or elephant can be

found in near-contemporary sources. The alleged romance did not last for long, as the rebels killed Yaqut in a clash.

Though Raziya had suppressed her opponents early in her reign, the powerful provincial governors remained at large. They were, however, not in a position to march to Delhi and capture it. An uprising of the Carmathians or Ismailis, who had attacked the Jama Masjid of Delhi, was crushed soon after her enthronement (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* 1970, I: 646). Thus, even as Raziya's dominion was shrinking, with Rajputs also reasserting themselves, Delhi was still secure. However, the rebellion of her own loyal officers proved to be her nemesis. Her tactical marriage (*nikah*) to one of the rebels did not help either. Defeated by an army of the rebels who had enthroned Mu'iz-ud-Din Bahram Shah as the new sultan, Raziya was captured and killed by the Hindus near Kaithal. If she had been a man, Minhaj-us-Siraj and other Persian authorities would have hailed her as a martyr or *shahid*.

Returning to the Chishti narrative, before his death, Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki had nominated Sheikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar as his spiritual successor. Also known as Baba Farid and especially venerated in Sikh tradition (for his devotional poetry incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib), the sheikh, called a mad boy (*diwana bachcha*) in younger days, had met Bakhtiyar Kaki at his native Multan and joined the order as his disciple. He was at Hansi, in Hisar district (now in Haryana), at the time of Bakhtiyar Kaki's death and could only reach Delhi three days later. Soon the sheikh decided to leave for Hansi, notwithstanding the reminder from the fellow mystics and followers that Qutb-ud-Din had chosen him for the *wilayat* of Delhi. Farid defended his decision to leave the place, as on account of blessings received from his *pir*, he could no longer differentiate a city from a desert; in other words, he did not need to live in Delhi, as blessings bestowed upon him by his preceptor remained the same in both the city and the desert (*ke ne'mat-i ma ra pir rawan kardeh ast dar shahr haman ast o dar bayaban haman*: *Siyar-ul-Auliya* 1978, 83). Farid may have been uncomfortable with Delhi's aggressive political culture. Bakhtiyar Kaki's problems with his fellow sheikhs in Delhi may also have been at the back of his mind. Farid, thus, returned to Hansi, before shifting permanently to Ajodhan, deferentially referred to as Pak Pattan, now in Pakistani Punjab. It is at Ajodhan that Farid's reputation as a charismatic spiritual leader was built, which made him something of a living legend. Significantly, an all-powerful noble under Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud, Ghiyas-ud-Din Balban, then known as Ulugh Khan, was a devotee of Sheikh Farid (for studies on the shaikh's life and legends and traditions associated with him, see Nizami 1955; Aquil 2003; Eaton 2003).

Ghiyas-ud-Din Balban ruled for over 40 years from about the middle of the thirteenth century – acting first as *naib* (deputy) of the puppet Shamsi Sultan Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud (ruled 1246–1266) and subsequently ascending the throne of Delhi as sultan (ruled 1266–1287) in his own right. Balban had come to the throne at a time when the Mongols had ravaged the major part of the Muslim world. Having sacked Punjab, they were threatening to take Delhi by storm.

Celebrating the destruction of the Abbasid seat of power at Baghdad, the Mongol leader Halaku Khan had sent his envoys to Delhi in 1259–1260. The *naib*, himself a captive of the Tartars not long back, welcomed the guests in typical Mongol fashion. The route that the visitors' cavalcade took was ornamented with severed heads of the rebels of the neighbourhood of Delhi. Their bodies were stuffed with straw to be displayed. Besides, 200,000 footmen and 50,000 horsemen were posted along the way. The chronicler Minhaj-us-Siraj records in his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* that nothing in particular occurred on the occasion but exposed to the spectacle of violence – both visual and suggestive – the envoys must have returned with sufficient idea of Delhi's power and its aggressive postures.

Further, Balban not only rebuilt and fortified the cities in Punjab and Sindh, which had suffered at the hands of the Tartars but also constructed large forts on the route to the North-West in order to block the Mongol advance into the Sultanate territories. Balban, thus, ensured that Delhi did not go the way of Baghdad, even as the sultan lost his favourite son, Muhammad, who was killed by the Mongols in an engagement at the western frontier. Immigration from Central Asia, Iran, and the Middle East continued in his reign, and even erstwhile rulers and princes of those regions, including Abbasids, came to Delhi as refugees. Balban included them in his nobility and established separate *muhallas* (localities) for their residence. In the early seventeenth century, Farishta listed as many as 15 *muhallas* set up by Balban for his august immigrants (*Tarikh-i-Farishta* 1983, I: 280).

Delhi was protected from the Mongol menace, but nearer home the Mewatis or Meos, an indigenous tribe from the Mewat region of Haryana and adjoining areas of Alwar and Bharatpur in Rajasthan, were a constant source of anxiety. They were accused of all kinds of crimes in the city, including theft, robbery, and molestation, only to disappear in the neighbouring forests. Balban took a whole year to suppress the marauders. The forests around Delhi were cut, and an estimated one lakh Meos were put to death. Many *thanas* (military posts) were established and assigned to the Afghan warlords and soldiers to keep the Meos subdued in their own backyard. The destruction of the rebels in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and Katehr (Rohilkhand) and the protection of trade routes, especially the road to Awadh, were other achievements of Balban, which brought great prestige to the throne of Delhi (for Ziya-ud-Din Barani's detailed mid-fourteenth-century account of the history of the period, see *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* n.d., fols. 13b–45a). Seen against the backdrop of the anarchy in the aftermath of the death of Iltutmish, Balban's measures restored the authority of the crown and provided peace and tranquility to the common people. His famed Red Palace (Kushak-i-Lal), well-known for its pomp and grandeur, is now in ruins. His dilapidated tomb near Qutb Minar is noted for the use of the true arch for the first time, marking an important technical advance in Indo-Islamic architecture.

There is an important relationship between the religious culture of Delhi and its spatial contours, which were changing right through this period. One of the notable omissions in accounts of the so-called seven cities of Delhi is

Kilokhari. Touted as the new city of Delhi (*shahr-i-nau*), it remained the liveliest urban setting for roughly the whole of the thirteenth century. Seeking to break free from the normative model of a medieval Islamic city, Hazrat-i-Dehli's sophisticated elite was increasingly moving out in search of a more cosmopolitan location. Uncomfortable with the arrogance of the *ulama*, who represented Islamic orthodoxy, even a number of Sufis preferred to stay away from the overpopulated Old Delhi, corresponding to the present-day Mehrauli area of south Delhi.

Located along the bank of an obviously much cleaner Yamuna, Kilokhari and the adjacent Ghiyaspur was fast expanding. By the end of the century, it stretched roughly from the present-day 'Nizamuddin' area where Humayun's Tomb was later built to the Okhla crossing on the Mathura Road. Sufis, princes, intellectuals, poets, singers, and other like-minded people either settled in the area or frequently visited it. Some came in search of peace and tranquility, while others came for their share of fun and frolic. Whereas the city's patron saint Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya placed it on the then expanding map of the sacred geography of Islam, the bohemian Sultan Mu'iz-ud-Din Kaiqubad's escapades brought it a high degree of infamy in conservative Muslim circles. References to music assemblies in the area, both of the pietistic mystical nature and those catering to the popular tastes, can be found in contemporary and near-contemporary writings (*Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* n.d., fols. 63b; 73b–77b).

Indeed, the princes and the rulers used the area as a resort. It was while relaxing here that Sultan Rukn-ud-Din Firuz learnt of the coup by Raziya Sultan. He was captured by Raziya's forces from here and imprisoned before his unceremonious elimination. The place is particularly associated with Sultan Kaiqubad, who decided to shift his capital from the congested old city, for an unending party (or orgy, according to some sources) that saw his end. In the middle of the fourteenth century, historians Ziya-ud-Din Barani and Izz-ud-Din Isami condemned the self-indulgence of the sovereign and his companions.

It is, however, unfair to dismiss the monarch as a sex-obsessed epicurean, blind to the nicer aspects of the society and culture that he ruled over. Early sources refer to the construction of his palace and gardens overlooking the Yamuna. He had also built a congregational mosque where no less a personality than Nizam-ud-Din Auliya reportedly performed his Friday prayers. Though the Sufi sheikh lived at Ghiyaspur at the far end of the settlement, he had rented a house at Kilokhari as well. The sheikh may also have performed the congregational 'Id prayers at Kilokhari itself.

After suppressing the rebels led by Khusrau Khan who had killed Kaiqubad and styled himself as a Muslim sultan, Jalal-ud-Din Firuz Khalji (ruled 1290–1296) enthroned himself at Kilokhari but chose to shift the seat of his power back to the old city in the second year of his rule, though hectic building activities in the new area by him are also recorded. The nobility and influential businessmen, too, constructed palatial houses in the vicinity. The king, however, decided to move to Old Delhi as soon as he got enough support and

legitimacy for his power and authority. The decision might also have been influenced by the need to nip in the bud any uprising from the politically vibrant old city. The fate of Kaiqubad and earlier Rukn-ud-Din Firuz were fresh enough to be a lesson for the new ruler. The abandoned Kilokhari was left to its own devices. It was eventually wiped off the Sultanate's landscape.

The various localities (*shahar* and *muhallat*) of Delhi were established over the centuries only to be left in ruins. Powerful rulers, grand palaces, and lofty titles emerged on the scene but were soon relegated to the pages of history. Similar was the fate of the courtiers, with their glory lasting for a short period. One personality, which defies this pattern, is that of the Chishti Sufi saint Hazrat Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Auliya (died 1325). Also referred to as Sultan-ul-Mashaykh (Sultan of the Sufis) and Mahbub-i-Ilahi (Beloved of God), the saint's shrine (*dargah*) in central Delhi has attracted a large number of devotees over the centuries.

The charismatic Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din's life is well documented. *Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad*, a large collection of his discourses was compiled in his lifetime and checked and corrected by the saint himself. It is supplemented by *Khayr-ul-Majalis*, conversations of his immediate successor (*khalifa*) Sheikh Nasir-ud-Din Chiragh-i-Dehli (see *Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad* 1990; *Khayr-ul-Majalis* 1959). Two early *tazkiras* (biographical dictionaries), *Qiwam-ul-Aqa'id* and *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, corroborate the accounts (see *Qiwam-ul-Aqa'id* 1994; *Siyar-ul-Auliya* 1978). Besides, the voluminous writings of the saint's two close disciples, Amir Khusrau and Ziya-ud-Din Barani, further supplement the information. Later authorities have largely depended on these writings for their reconstruction of the life of the saint. The most respected of these biographies remains the *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar* of Sheikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlawi. These works are extant in both original Persian and later Urdu translations. *Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad* is also available in two recent English translations (Z. Faruqi 1996; Lawrence 1991). Utilizing these sources, one can chart the life of the saint, even if one ignores a vast set of popular Sufi writings, such as *Afzal-ul-Fawa'id*, *Rahat-ul-Muhibbin*, and *Rahat-ul-Qulub*, which were in circulation in the fourteenth century but are dismissed by some modern scholars as 'apocryphal' and, therefore, useless (though it is difficult to agree with such a proposition).

Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din was born and brought up in Badaun, now in western Uttar Pradesh. Like many qualified young *alims* (religious scholars) of his age, Nizam-ud-Din too moved to the *dar-ul-khilafa* (Delhi) in search of job opportunities. He was also compelled to do so as the responsibility of maintaining the family comprising his widowed mother and sister rested on his shoulders. The city, indeed, attracted *madrasa* graduates to man its administrative and religious institutions. They were absorbed into various positions such as *imams* and *khatibs* (prayer-leaders of the mosque), *qazis* (judges), and *muftis* (jurisconsults). Nizam-ud-Din himself was known to be trying for the *qazi*'s post before being introduced to the Chishti saint Baba Farid.

Impressed by the erudite young scholar, Farid immediately enrolled him as a disciple and soon appointed him as his successor. Nizam-ud-Din, thus,

joined the illustrious list of saints of the Chishti order (*silsila*), comprising Khwaja Mu'in-ud-Din Ajmeri, Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, and Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar. Nizam-ud-Din's successor, Nasir-ud-Din Chiragh-i-Dehli, completes the chain of the 'great' Chishti tradition, which is known to have played a crucial role in shaping the political and cultural outlook of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They are particularly known for their religious tolerance and broad-mindedness. It is their liberal attitude, coupled with their perceived ability to perform miracles and the consequent popularity, which brought them in conflict with Islamic orthodoxy, and in the case of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, in conflict with the rulers as well.

The saint's encounter with two Delhi Sultans, Qutb-ud-Din Mubarakshah Khalji (ruled 1316–1320) and Ghiyas-ud-Din Tughluq (ruled 1320–1325), is particularly celebrated in Chishti memory. Even as Nizam-ud-Din was concerned about the political instability of the period, the rulers were evidently angry over his indifference towards the court (*darbar*) and its rituals. Seen from the point of view of the saint, his visit to the court would have amounted to accepting the superiority of the ruler over his own claim to authority in his *wilayat* or spiritual territory. Indeed, the Sufis' claim to power and authority in society was a continuous source of tension for the kings and the *ulama* alike. In such a situation, the Sufis had to defend their actions in the light of the *shari'at*. Occasionally, they also resorted to their so-called paranormal powers to defeat the opponents. The reports of their victory in such cases contributed to their authoritative position in society (Digby 1986; Aquil 2017b, Ch. 3).

This happened in the case of Nizam-ud-Din's conflict with his antagonists as well. He had to defend the legitimacy of his interest in music (*sama* or *qawwali*) in the light of the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. The conservative *ulama*, however, insisted that he must follow the Hanafite interpretation of Sunni Islam, according to which listening to music was a forbidden act. In such a condition, the sheikh was left to curse his detractors. The saint's righteousness was established with the sultans and their supporters being eliminated in quick succession. While a close confidante killed Qutb-ud-Din Mubarakshah Khalji, Ghiyas-ud-Din's death in an accident on the outskirts of Delhi was suspected to be the handiwork of his own son, who enthroned himself as Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq (ruled 1325–1351). Ghiyas-ud-Din was returning from a campaign in Bengal and had sent a *farman* (imperial order) asking Nizam-ud-Din to leave the city. The saint had, however, responded with a cryptic remark: *hunuz dilli dur ast*; that is, Delhi is yet far away (for the ruler). Yahya Sirhindi had recorded this within a century in his early-fifteenth century history, *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* 1931, 96–97), quoting the Sufi as saying: '*dehli az tu dur ast*'. The use of the dismissive *tu*, instead of the respectful *shuma* for 'you', showed the Sufi's contempt for the sultan. *Dilli dur ast* remains a common refrain for those who cannot make it even now. Incidentally, the king never did return to the city. According to the Chishti tradition, the provocation of the saint's *jalal*, the wrathful aspect of

his personality, led to the sultan's elimination. By contrast, Nizam-ud-Din Auliya blessed Muhammad Tughluq and reportedly announced the bestowal of kingship to him even before Ghiyas-ud-Din had died (*Qiwam-ul-Aqa'id* 1994, 96). However, Nizam-ud-Din did not live to see the rule of the eccentric Sultan Muhammad Tughluq. In his death in 1325, Delhi had lost a messiah. His hospice at Ghiyaspur, near the later Humayun's Tomb, was a continuous source of sustenance for people. His image of a benevolent miracle worker helping people in times of crisis, coupled with his charitable endeavours and a broad worldview aimed at winning the hearts of the people cutting across the barriers of institutionalized religions, had added to the charisma. This role was subsequently taken up by his *dargah*, which soon emerged as a major pilgrimage centre, located in the heart of modern-day Delhi.

Chishti relations with the Tughluqs deteriorated somewhat under Nizam-ud-Din's successor, Nasir-ud-Din Chiragh-i-Dehli (for a modern biography, see Nizami 1991b). The latter managed to keep the Chishti tradition alive in Delhi at a time when Muhammad Tughluq was reported to have turned hostile towards the sheikh, even as he was generally insisting on the cooperation of the Sufis and *ulama* in strengthening his hold in the Deccan. Though the contemporary accounts concerning the shifting of the capital to Devgiri, renamed Daulatabad, are extremely exaggerated, Sufi tradition celebrates the Chishti sheikh's insistence on staying back in his *wilayat*; his house was said to be the only one where the lamp kept burning in an otherwise deserted Delhi. This earned him the title of Chiragh-i-Dehli or the lamp of Delhi. A measure which speaks of the sheikh's confidence and his sense of responsibility is that he was actively involved in the enthronement of Firuz Shah Tughluq (ruled 1351–1388) after Muhammad Tughluq's death while campaigning in Uchch in Sindh.

With Chiragh-i-Dehli, the first cycle of the five 'great' Chishtis came to an end, for he did not nominate any of his disciples as his chief successor in the Chishti order. A large number of Chishti Sufis, mainly the disciples of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, had spread all over Hindustan, Bengal, and the Deccan, but their control over Delhi was weakening. Politically, too, Delhi's power was waning. Even as Timur or Tamerlane had invaded and sacked Delhi (in 1398), the leading Chishti saint, Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz, a disciple of Chiragh-i-Dehli, avoided being a victim of the calamity by leaving for a safer bastion in the Deccan. Thus, the connections between the rise and decline of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the corresponding graph of the Chishti masters in the period are too striking to be ignored.

The foregoing account is relevant for our understanding of a number of key themes in the history of Chishti Sufism, which emerged as an important devotional movement with its base in Delhi and Ajmer in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is also significant as the Chishtis occupy an important position in the history of Sufism and are noted for their crucial social and political roles in the Indian environment. A recurring theme in the Sufi literature, both hagiographies and the compilations of *malfuzat*, is the

authoritative position of the Sufi sheikhs in the society and politics of the Delhi Sultanate. An important source of the sheikh's authority was his perceived ability to perform miracles.

The Sufi sheikhs were not ascetics. They were supposed to live among the people and help mitigate their sufferings. For Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, *tark-i-duniya*, or renunciation of the world did not mean that one should wear a *langota* or loincloth and set off to live in the forest. Shunning all the anxieties of attachment to this world, whether private and public, the Sufis called for soul-searching, remembrance of God beyond the ritual prayers of the mosques, meditation in solitude, and wandering around as dervishes in the Muslim cities and non-Muslim or semi-Islamicized hinterlands. At the end of it, they reappeared with claims of personally experiencing the truth of Islam, of the loving God, and the righteousness of the path of the Prophet (strengthening here the *ulama*'s position). As religious exemplars, then, the Sufis were supposed to guide the Muslims, ignoring or tolerating human weaknesses. It is also suggested that the Chishti belief in the doctrine of *wahdat-ul-wujud* (monistic idea of unity of existence) brought it very close to various streams of non-Muslim mystical traditions, making it tolerant and accommodative.

Sufism in the Indian environment was marked by interesting interactions between diverse religio-intellectual traditions at various levels, distinguished by the concern to learn about/from each other and carve out a *modus vivendi*. This is reflected in music, painting, architecture, growth, and development of vernacular literature and evolution of 'syncretistic' communities that incorporated beliefs and practices common to Islam and other religious currents. To start with, this initiative came from the great tradition of the Chishti Sufis of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: three out of five of them lived in Delhi and shaped the liberal character of the city, ensuring, deliberately or otherwise, that it did not take the homogeneous shape of a predominantly Muslim city. No wonder, despite the hostile sectarian and communal environment all around Chishti, *dargahs* have continued to flourish in Delhi, making it a sacred city, a prominent pilgrimage centre for devotional Islam in the subcontinent, and the political capital of the country marked by its cultural diversity throughout its long history.

Thus, Sufi traditions included contested practices such as music, *qawwali*, and other forms of poetry of love and relations with custodians of Sunni Islam, as well as ruling regimes, especially the Sultans of Delhi, with whom there was both a conflict of claims to authority and consensus on how to conquer and govern. Thus, Sufis played important roles in shaping political culture and controlling the involvement of religion in it. Opening of the door to their hospices (*jama'atkhana/khanaqah*) and later the shrines (*dargah/darbar/mazar sharif*) to all sections of people, across religious, caste, and gender divides, meant creating a spiritual space where boundaries could be crossed. This was possible through the Sufis' monistic doctrine of unity of existence – belief in doing away with all distinctions between God and human beings and between human beings themselves.

Together, all these added to the formation of a spiritually imbued environment at Sufi shrines, and the character of the city itself was marked by widespread Sufi-oriented devotionalism. In the sacred geography of Hindustan, even though the place to go to was Ajmer, Delhi emerged as its centre. The religious milieu encouraged purification of the soul, cultivation of the heart completely devoted to God, and, since the latter is supposed to have created everything, love and respect for all His creations. The annual *Urs* celebrations (death anniversary) at Sufi shrines continually reinforce these values of considerable cultural and political import. They bring together people from various sections of society in a spiritual atmosphere in which arbitrary and hostile social and political boundaries collapse. The *qawwals* (singers and musicians) sing praise for religious exemplars (God, prophets, spiritual masters), and keepers of shrines pray for sincere aspirations of devotees and for peace and tranquility in society in general. Love for God and service to humanity is the principal mantra at the shrines.

Despite pressures from puritanical fundamentalists, this model of devotion and respect for Sufi shrines and their relevance for critical social and cultural roles can be seen thriving in other towns and cities as well. The continuous need for a broad-based and inclusive political culture means Sufi-oriented Islamic principles will continue to be invoked for respecting social difference and creating communal harmony in the heterogeneous, cosmopolitan, and urbane environment of a city like Delhi.

Acknowledgements

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4 The East India Company, English Protestants, and the wider Christian community in seventeenth-century Surat, Bombay, and Madras

Haig Z. Smith

When English travellers and East India Company (EIC) merchants arrived in the cities of Surat, Bombay, and Madras in the seventeenth century, they encountered cosmopolitan spaces that were centres of not only commerce but also religious interaction and exchange. In these urban environments, the English Protestants came into contact with merchants and brokers from across Europe and Asia who represented a variety of faiths and ethnicities, including Memon Sunnis, Khoja Shias, Turkish Chalebis, Bengali Banias, Zoroastrian Parsis, and Cochin Jews (Sharma 2014: 50). Alongside these groups, India's port cities were also home to a variety of Christian communities, including Armenians, French Capuchins, Dutch Protestants, Portuguese Jesuits, and St. Thomas Christians. The presence of these communities in Bombay and Madras presented the English Protestants with a dilemma. Not only did they represent religious familiarity, friendship, and cooperation, but they also offered spiritual competition and antagonism. Moreover, the religious diversity of India's port cities was compounded by the variety of Protestant sects that were represented among the employees of the EIC (Smith 2017: 98–100). Life in these urban spaces forced the English to approach religious diversity differently from how it was perceived in England. Although the conflicts that defined Christianity in early modern Europe informed the attitudes of Englishmen and women in India, they did not always characterize their responses when engaging the heterogeneous religious community in South Asia.

Surat, Bombay, and Madras and their religiously cosmopolitan populations proved to be an incentive and a headache for many of the English officials involved in trade and commerce with India. The EIC was tasked both with controlling the spiritual lives of their English employees who travelled east in the seventeenth century and establishing and spreading Protestantism abroad. Throughout the period, English officials were worried about the effects of living in religiously diverse urban environments in India (Smith 2017: 100–103). In particular, many were worried by the prospect of apostasy and cultural emulation. In a letter written some years after leaving England, Streynsham Master recalled that an acquaintance had been concerned that he would 'forget god' and be 'shaken in those principles which I had been educated' (BL IOR, MSS EUR E 210/1, Streynsham Master, unsent letter).

In order to prevent this, EIC officials in both England and India developed various methods to secure the observance of Protestantism in India. They did this by establishing political articles, employing chaplains, and designating spaces in these urban environments for regular communal religious observances. These articles, chaplains, and spaces became governmental and architectural representations of English attempts to make Protestantism a visible, imposing presence in India's port towns.

Key to the development of EIC control in Bombay and Madras was the adoption of a policy of reluctant toleration or sufferance, where they begrudgingly accepted the presence of the diverse religious communities in Indian towns and cities. In the years that followed the acquisition of Bombay and Madras, the EIC was forced to expand its authority beyond its factories into the religiously cosmopolitan urban spaces it controlled (David 1973; Ames 2003; Stern 2008). Following this, the EIC adopted innovative methods to govern over the religiously diverse behaviours – including those of some Christian communities – found in the cities they controlled. These actions were calculated attempts by the EIC leadership to secure the English commercial and governmental agendas through policing the political and religious behaviour of their employees and of the members of various Christian groups who lived in Bombay and Madras.

The chapter focuses on how Protestant religious life was established and adapted in the English factories, forts, and townships in the cities of Surat, Bombay, and Madras and how Protestants dealt with the religious, cultural, and physical challenges of life in India. It covers the period between 1601 and 1700 and focuses on the English control of these spaces. Firstly, it discusses how the EIC sought to ensure that Protestantism continued to be observed by its personnel in India. Secondly, it investigates how Protestantism, and broadly Christianity, was controlled in these cosmopolitan environments. Finally, it assesses the ways in which Protestants interacted with other religious communities in these towns and cities.

The daily lives of Protestants in areas controlled by the EIC were closely monitored by the presence of chaplains, as company officials believed they were essential to ensuring the success of the commercial and evangelical missions of the English in India (Smith 2017: 93–95). One EIC official in London informed a chaplain travelling to India that in order to obtain the 'love and estimation amongst those heathenish people', the English had to establish a 'Civil Government' based on English Protestant ideals (O'Connor 2012: 48). Moreover, it was the role of the chaplain to ensure that such a 'modest and sober government' was established (ibid.). This was done by ensuring that the spiritual and secular lives of English Protestants who travelled to India were strictly monitored and controlled. In particular, the frequent accusation that personnel were 'dangerously disordering themselves with drink and whores' was dealt with quickly to prevent the reputation of Protestantism from being damaged across India, especially in the cities where the English operated (see letter from Bantam quoted in Keay 1991: 48; Foster 1934: 95).

Members of EIC leadership were concerned that the 'ungodly behaviour' of personnel had a prejudicial effect upon religious and, subsequently, commercial and diplomatic relations in the cities that the English operated in. Many officials feared that it damaged the image and reputation of Protestantism among populations of Surat, Madras, and Bombay (Sainsbury 1870: 264, Captain Pring to the EIC, March 23, 1619). One chaplain recalled during his time in India that local people in Surat had complained about the conduct of the English sailors and merchants who came ashore in the port. He wrote, in pidgin English, 'Christian religion, Devil religion, Christians much drunk, Christians much do wrong, much beat, much abuse others' (Terry 1655: 239). This kind of behaviour, he argued, was the 'most sad and horrible thing' and caused 'scandal' to be brought 'upon the Christian religion' in India (ibid.), thereby damaging the position of the English and the Protestant faith in the city. To govern over its factory effectively in Surat, EIC factors repeatedly requested that officials in London send them more chaplains in order to effectively monitor and police the behaviour of their employees in India. They argued that if they were sent godly ministers who enforced the laws of God and England, they would be able to build 'a well ordered and morally unassailable Protestant society' in India's cities (Stern 2011: 117–118). Although factories were separate entities within Indian cities, this did not translate into an early policy of social or religious segregation between the English and the local populations. Nor was there any recognition of the benefits of integration; instead, it was an acknowledgement that total isolation was prejudicial to the various aims the English had in India. However, in the years that followed the acquisitions of Madras and Bombay, governance was no longer limited to the physical confines of the factory in marking the cultural and religious boundaries of national identity. Officials not only needed to ensure the good behaviour of the EIC's Protestant personnel but also had to regulate the behaviour of thousands of people whose faiths differed from their own. By settling a 'modest and sober government', the EIC hoped to not only secure commercial success but also obtain the 'love and estimation' of the 'heathenish people' in cities like Surat, Bombay, and Madras (O'Connor 2012: 48).

Among the English, the Protestant Chaplaincy was a pervasive institutional presence in Indian ports. Their job was to remind the company's English personnel of their Protestant faith, as well as to regulate the interactions of EIC personnel with local leaders, officials, and people (Smith 2018a: 226–229). From the initial stages of English interaction in India, it was often chaplains who were the first to notice and comment upon the religious diversity of India. In Surat, Edward Terry, chaplain to Thomas Roe, the first ambassador to India, argued that the policies of emperors Akbar and Jahangir had made their 'tyrannical government there to be more easily endured' (Terry 1655: 418). In a story that is most likely apocryphal, Thomas Roe recalled that Jahangir had once drunkenly declared, 'Christians, Moores, Jewes, he meddled not with their faith; they came all in love, and he would protect them from wrong' (Foster 1899, II: 382). Roe's inclusion of this story

highlights English travellers' confusion and, sometimes, disdain towards Mughal authority and religious cosmopolitanism in Indian cities. Terry often commented on this when recalling his time in India. In particular, he wrote of an incident involving the famous English Protestant traveller Thomas Coryate and a Muezzin. In the story, Terry recalled Coryate climbing a building opposite a mosque in Surat to shout back at a 'Moolas' call for prayer, declaring '*La alla illa alla, Hasaret Easa Ben-alia*; that is, no God, but one God, and the Lord Christ, the Son of God'. To add insult to injury, Coryate then went on to declare, 'Mahomet was an imposter' (Terry 1655: 271). On another occasion, Coryate admonished an Imam for his faith, proclaiming that, as a Christian, he was theologically a better Muslim than the Imam, as his Christian faith meant he was the 'true believer' (ibid.). Terry concluded that Coryate was lucky to be in India for 'everyone there hath liberty to profess his own Religion freely and if he please may argue against theirs, without fear of an inquisition' (ibid.). For much of this early period, misunderstanding and miscommunication not only defined the English response to local religious governance but also how they established and communicated Protestantism to local peoples and elites in India's urban centres.

Whether for commercial opportunity, travel, employment, or intellectual curiosity, increasing numbers of Englishmen and women travelled to India, taking up residence in various cities throughout the seventeenth century. This community did not make up one homogeneous religious unit but rather represented the spectrum of Protestants that was symptomatic of religious life back in England. As such, the doctrinal and political debates and prejudices that characterized life in England were mirrored overseas in India (Smith 2018a: 231). As Alison Games has pointed out, urban spaces such as Surat, Bombay, and Madras were arenas where Protestantism underwent a process of 'dispute, [and] experimentation' (Games 2008: 253). This experimentation was not only a response to the difficulties of spiritual life in English factories, home to a small, close-knit but diverse Protestant community, but also a reaction to engaging with religiously cosmopolitan populations in Indian cities. Just as in England, officials in India strove to establish conformity, with one governor of Bombay warning that 'confusion in matters of religion' had contributed to the onset of the War of the Three Kingdoms in England, and it similarly risked destabilizing life in India if left unchecked (BL IOR, H/49: Surat to London, November 26, 1669). A small community that was instantly recognizable, Protestants in cities such as Surat, Bombay, and Madras formed an intimate collective and the frictions and divisions that were transported to Indian cities were magnified in such close-knit conditions.

One example of this friction occurred in Madras in 1668 when the Rev. Walter Hook refused to read from the Book of Common Prayer or follow the traditional Church of England liturgy, causing dissent and social disharmony for over two days (Foster 1906–1927, XIII: 284–287, citing Diary of Smithson, August 21, 1669). In the same year, the factors at Bombay and Surat complained to the general court in London that there was discord among them due to the 'principles of religion owned and practised' by them differing

'from the opinions professed by the gentlemen you have sent us' (Foster 1906–1927, XII: 248, Surat General Letter, November 25, 1669). On another occasion, after being accused of not observing divine worship on the Sabbath, one agent commented that the diverse community of Protestants in Indian cities made it difficult to please everyone, writing 'it will be difficult to calculate an Ephemerides that will serve all Meridians' (BL IOR, E/3, Bridges to Hall, May 12, 1669). In response to the conflicts caused by this Protestant diversity, the second governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier, believed it appropriate to remind the English in the city that it was their duty to treat each other 'with all civility and due respect' and 'embrace' each other in 'the arms of brotherly love' (BL IOR, E/3, Surat General Letter, November 25, 1669). Officials like Aungier were keen not to draw attention to any religious division among the English Protestant community in India. Instead, he presented Protestants in India as a united community, describing them as 'one body of the Christian congregation', brushing off any spiritual differences between individuals in the community as being 'in outward ceremony only' (ibid.). Although the divisions between Protestants caused problems that occasionally flared into social tension, English officials both in India and London worked hard to prevent this, concerned that it would damage their reputation.

To ensure that religious life was peaceably observed by Protestants living in Indian cities and towns, English officials ordered that daily religious communion either through church service or communal prayer be held. In 1616, the company ordered that, in all its factories, its Protestant personnel were to meet every morning and evening to 'heare divyne service' (Foster 1934: 95). These meetings served as a form of social control by ensuring that at least twice a day the English Protestant community in a factory, or city, congregated together as a group, allowing factors and chaplains to assess the spiritual and secular conduct of their brethren. English officials believed that such collective meetings ensured the continued observance of Protestantism in India, providing 'strong meat, for all growing Christians' (Terry 1655: 463). These meetings were considered so important that its factors were ordered to make attendance compulsory, stipulating that even company business was to be postponed during services and that sickness was the only excuse to be absent (Foster 1896–1902, III: 57, Commission to David Midelton, March 12, 1614).

Throughout the seventeenth century, finding a space to hold religious meetings was a regular source of concern for the EIC and, increasingly, officials in Surat, Bombay, and Madras were encouraged to designate specific rooms in factories solely for worship or to build chapels and churches. For much of the seventeenth century, Protestants in these cities worshipped within designated rooms or chapels in the factories. These shared spaces in which Protestants often met were safe from the gaze of Indian workers: as one contemporary wrote, 'At prayer we may not be disturbed or gazed on by the Workmen and Coolies that are continually about the factory' (BL IOR, E/3, Shem Bridges to Joseph Hall, Ballasore, May 12, 1669). In Madras, the chapel was often used as

a 'dining roome', than which, according to one commentator, 'nothing can be more Scandalous' in India (BL IOR, MSS EUR E 210/1, 'The Character of the Government at Fort St. George from 1672 to 1677', Sir William Langhorne Agent). Such use of these areas was not only a danger to the reputation of the EIC but also Protestant faith among the local populations. It was not always the case that the English did not have specifically designated spaces solely used for worship. For example, in Bengal, one English traveller wrote of there being a 'very beautiful chapel for divine service' (Foster 1906–1927, XI: 284, William Gifford to Company, January 6, 1664). However, just as space in Indian towns and cities is at a premium today, it was no different in the seventeenth century. Often, for practical reasons, rooms in factories had dual uses. In Balasore, one chief agent wrote that there was no place to entertain local dignitaries or hold events other 'than the hall', which, for need of space, 'must be our Church' (BL IOR, E/3, Bridges to Hall, Ballasore, May 12, 1669). Space was not the only issue for those living in urban factories as the English had to manage meteorological conditions associated with Indian cities. As is so often the case, temperature presented northern European Protestants with a problem, as Englishmen and women struggled to cope with the heat and humidity of India. Meeting in large groups, for long periods of time, in rooms that were poorly ventilated became a source of annoyance and discomfort for many. One company employee complained that 'in these hot countries', they should only be expected to meet once for service (ibid.). According to them, 'a man's spirits nor voice can hold touch here with long duties' in the heat, meaning that, more so than usual, church services became unbearable for both preacher and congregation. In response to these conditions, many refused to attend church and, in some cases, even broke the Sabbath to work (ibid.; Foster 1934: 95). Orders from London to have services twice a day highlighted the disconnect between expectations of life in India in Europe and the reality of living in Indian cities. Living in the factories in Indian towns and cities not only presented issues surrounding the cosmopolitan nature of religious life there but also environmental, practical, and geographical problems that had to be resolved.

One solution to solving the issue of space was to build churches that served not only to house worshippers but also to provide visible symbols of Protestantism's arrival and permanent presence in India. In 1660, almost 16 years after the building of Fort St. George had been completed, company officials began receiving complaints that two French friars had built a church to 'boldly perform their idolatrous rites' and that the company had failed to build one to 'serve God in a better manner' (Foster 1906–1927, X: 402–406). The writer of the letter criticized the failure of the English to build a church and acknowledged that it was in the interest of the Protestant faith and the nation to ensure that a church is built 'to serve God in some public place' (ibid.). The author concluded that to do so would ensure that 'strangers' and other religious communities in Madras would more publicly 'see and hear' that the followers of the Protestant church practised their faith 'orderly, reverently and decently' (ibid.). Streynsham Master, the EIC agent in Madras, would later describe the 'irreverence and disregard of

religion' that had been shown to their faith during this period by predecessors who had refused to build a church (Temple 1911, I: 65). Likewise, Master also mentioned 'the French Padrys Church', complaining about their success at evangelizing among local communities. Master commented that the French had, over this time, 'enlarged' their congregation by building a church and that this had been to the detriment of Protestants in the city (ibid.). The reason for the priests' success in Madras was down to the English not making any attempts to establish a physical presence in the town by 'building a Church for the Protestants' (ibid.). A contemporary of Master's also observed this, complaining that, unlike the Catholics in the town who had a designated graveyard, the English were 'forc't to carry our dead corpses out of the town' (Foster 1906–1927, XI: 58). However, despite the complaints, no attempts were made to build a church in Madras until 1678, when Master set about gathering voluntary subscriptions for a church to be built in the fort (BL IOR, MSS EUR E 210/1: *A Memorandum of the Years in the East India Company by Streynsham Master during His Employment of 3 Years Agent upon the Coast of Cormandell & the Bay of Bengal & One Year Before*; Temple 1911, I: 64). In the same month that the first foundations for the church in Madras were laid, the council ordered 'that noe Papist shall bear office in the Garrison', dealing with both complaints (Temple 1911, I: 71). St. Mary's Church was eventually completed in 1680 and was the first Anglican church in India. Its construction marked a distinct shift in attitudes towards English Protestant religious practice in India. Its physical completion represented English Protestantism's arrival in India and, although as a faith it would have a limited following, St. Mary's was a symbol of the permanent mark the faith left on the religious landscape of India's cities.

Following the Braganza treaty and the acquisition of Bombay in 1661, English officials also sought to settle Protestantism as a forceful presence in the city. As soon as the English gained control of the port, officials declared that it was their 'chiefest care to promote his [Gods] service and worship'. However, they were also quick to note the difficulty of doing so when they lacked a church (BL IOR, H/48, Commission and Instructions to Sir George Oxenden, March 19, 1661/2). As with Madras, it would take some time before any formal plans or attempts would be made to raise funds for a church to be built. In January 1676, English officials in the city sent back plans for a substantial church to be built in Bombay. The governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier, selected a site (where St. Thomas's Cathedral currently stands) due to its close proximity to the fort for protection (Fawcett 1936, I:12). This grand church would hold 1,000 people, a substantial number considering Westminster Abbey in London seated only 2,000, and Bombay had a considerably smaller Protestant population than the English capital (ibid.). In 1687, the number of Englishmen and women in Bombay and Madras was extremely small. In Madras, it was estimated to be around 150 out of a population of over 10,000 people (Prakash 1998: 148). In Bombay, numbers were similar, although the mortality rates were higher.

Figures taken by the company between 1673 and 1675 put the English population of Bombay as being around 427 men, women, and children, although, within two years, a massive 41 per cent of that figure had died.[1] The plans also stipulated that, in line with reformist tradition, the church was to be plainly decorated and free of ornamentation. This was in stark contrast to the aesthetics of other churches in Bombay, which had been established during the period of Portuguese rule. English officials were always wary of the city's substantial European and indigenous Catholic population and, as such, the Protestant church was to rival the local Catholic churches in the area. In style, aesthetic, and size, St. Thomas's was designed to be a highly visible symbol of the new English regime and its power in the city. Moreover, officials hoped that the scale of the project would hinder Catholic attempts to convert the local Indian populations, instead encouraging them to turn to Protestantism as an alternative.

The same year that Master started to gather funds for St. Mary's in Madras, officials in Bombay obtained the required support to start building St. Thomas' Cathedral, receiving Rs. 4,000 in funds to the project. Although the initial building went well, with reports being received that by June 1678 one-third of the structure had been completed, they also warned that the funds which they had received were beginning to run out (Fawcett 1936, III: 14, 56). The financially gloomy reports would continue as letter after letter to the company in London warned of the growing sums of debt being incurred while building the church. Despite this, the completion of St. Thomas' Cathedral was considered so important that the EIC continued to ask for and receive funds for the project. They would even go so far as to request that Aungier's executors release sums from his legacy to go towards the building of the church. Within the city, the company also faced problems generating funds through voluntary subscriptions. This was compounded by demographics, as the number of Protestants in Bombay was limited and, after several years of repeated calls for donations, the small community had been financially drained. Moreover, urban economics also played its part in the reduction of subscriptions for the building of the church, as beyond the English and European Protestant community, the majority of the population of Bombay did not follow the same faith, nor did they have the same levels of financial liquidity. One official particularly noted this when he described how the 'generality of the inhabitants' in Bombay were 'very poore' and subsequently could not contribute the required amounts needed to complete the church (BL IOR, G/3/3, Deputy Governor Letter to the General Council of Bombay, 18 July 1685). Because of these issues, St. Thomas's Cathedral would not be completed until 1718 and marked a distinct failure in English attempts to stamp the Protestant church's authority in Bombay during the seventeenth century. However, this massive building project did highlight English attempts to make Protestantism a visible presence in Indian cities in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Although not a complete success, it did have an impact on the city by changing the physical landscape and the

social and religious psyche of Bombay's Indian and European inhabitants. Like the fort which represented a permanent military presence in Bombay and Madras, the building of churches symbolized not only the permanency of English residency but also their vision for India. This vision involved social and religious change, at the heart of which would be a visible Protestant church that would encourage conversion and engender support among the local populations, fundamentally changing Indian towns and cities.

In response to life in Bombay, Madras, and other Indian cities, English Protestants developed a form of passive evangelism that they believed would help to achieve the wider mission of Protestant expansion in India (Smith 2018b: 151–153). The territorial acquisitions of Madras and Bombay marked a change in English religious interaction in India as they came into direct governmental control over a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. In order to deal with the challenges that this created, the English adapted their evangelical agenda in an attempt to make Protestantism a more appealing religion. This involved the adoption of a policy of religious sufferance which was promoted as an alternative to the aggressive evangelism of Jesuits and Portuguese Catholics who had gone before them in Bombay and Madras (Stern 2011: 112). In 1669, a company official warned English Protestants against the damaging evangelical practices of Catholic ministers who used 'compulsion' as a means to convert locals. This had included reports of forcible baptism and child abductions, all of which the English believed had discouraged people from the areas surrounding Bombay from migrating to the islands (Foster 1906–1927, XIII: 218, Henry Young and James Adams, to Surat, February 22, 1669; ibid. 219, Young, Adams and Coates, March 17, 1669). The EIC responded to these practices by banning them, claiming that they had damaged intercommunal relations on the islands. In an attempt to prevent Catholic religious expansion in Bombay, the ban stipulated that no one, whether Catholic or Protestant, was to 'christen nor punish' any 'Gentiles without a licence' (ibid.). Moreover, it was an attempt to force Catholics to recognize the new Protestant order. Despite this, the presence of Catholics in Bombay continued to be a source of consternation as Protestant officials continued to complain about their presence. One repeated concern was that 'our Servants and other English' were being married, buried, and baptized by 'Romish Priests', and such a thing was 'so scandalous to the professors of the Reformed Religion' (Temple 1911, II: 260, General letter from the Court of Committees to the Agent and Council at Fort St. George 24, December 1675). The company again ordered that all such practices in the city cease, going so far as to order that if any married couple 'do not educate the Children in the Protestant Religion', they were to 'be sent home' (ibid.). The presence of Catholics in Madras and Bombay aggravated traditional opinions and mistrust between Catholics and Protestants, which had its origins in England and Europe. However, they forced English Protestants to deal with the political and religious inclusion of European and Asian Catholics into the spiritual, political, and social life of the cities they controlled.

The English attempted to present an alternative to the reports of forced conversion and aggressive evangelism being conducted by the Portuguese in cities and towns under their control. By doing so, the English in Bombay and Madras hoped that various communities in these cities would be encouraged to convert to Protestantism. This was an important agenda for English officials, as they saw conversion to Protestantism as one of the most effective means of securing the allegiance of the local people and, thereby, control over urban spaces. However, their attempts to convert Indian peoples in Bombay and Madras did not always go to plan, and the English struggled to deal with the spiritual elasticity of South Asian religion, in particular Hinduism. The flexibility of local religious doctrines and Indian people's capacity to incorporate and possess particular Christian beliefs and doctrines into their own faith baffled English officials in the city. As one commentator wrote, 'By the principles of their owne religion they are allowed our sermons (though not our prayers)' (Foster 1906–1927, XIII: 72, Bombay to Surat, October 18, 1668). Despite this, some saw this flexibility as a means to secure conversion by 'guile', catching various Indian communities in a 'net of the Gospel' and subsequently gaining control of Indian cities and shaping them into urban spaces that mirrored urban spaces in England (ibid.). However, this approach did not come without its detractors who believed that adoption of Protestant religious practices did not necessarily equate to full-blown conversion in Indian towns. As such, the authority of the English and their religious control over urban spaces was called into question by querying the validity and allegiance of those who had 'become a voluntary Christian' (ibid. 218; 22 February 1669). Control over urban spaces was founded on two intimately connected principles: firstly, the conversion of the Muslim, Hindu, Parsi, Armenian, Jewish, and Catholic communities and, secondly, attaining their political loyalty.

In light of this, English officials attempted to develop urban spaces that were Protestant in administration but, out of necessity, religiously and politically indulgent in outlook. The EIC governor, Sir Josiah Child, argued this when he declared that, although uniformity should be strived for in England, they should establish 'an Amsterdam of Liberty in our Plantations' (Child 1693: 191). The English attempted to adapt the practices of religious toleration used by their European counterparts in Asia to control the urban religious behaviour of those people who lived in Bombay and Madras. In an unsent letter, Streynsham Master highlighted the benefits of religious freedom in Madras (BL IOR, EUR. MSS. E/210). Focusing on Christians, Master described how Protestant, Catholic, and Armenian communities all had 'assemblies of their own Nations' and briefly outlined the individual ways in which these communities met and had political autonomy (ibid.). Ironically, Master observed that Christians in Indian cities lived more comfortably 'than in Europe' but continued to be loyal to the authorities in charge (BL IOR, EUR. MSS. E/210). By drawing attention to the religious diversity of the Christian community in Madras and their self-rule, Master debunked the fear that diversity would mean disloyalty. In India, it was just the opposite, with all religious communities being considered loyal enough to be granted some level of autonomy (Balachandran 2008: 1–9).

In 1684, Richard Keigwin's *The Articles of Agreement between the Governor and Inhabitants of Bombay* put Child's principles into action, guaranteeing the inhabitants of the city 'the liberty of Exercising their Respective Religion' (BL IOR, E/3/43, 'The Articles of Agreement between the Governor and Inhabitants of Bombay', December 29, 1683; February 8, 1684). This statement had been part of a series of moves started in the late 1660s offering religious suffrage to the Catholic community in Bombay, which had been negotiated in treaties with the Portuguese. The articles were designed to advertise the extension of this long-standing policy to other faiths in order to encourage Hindus and Muslims fleeing from persecution and conflict between the Mughal and Maratha states to migrate to the city. By doing so, Keigwin hoped to change the financial fortunes of the islands, securing the position of the English and the Protestant faith in India. Likewise, English officials in India and London sought to expand the policy to include the Armenian community in Bombay and Madras.

For much of the seventeenth century, the English were keen to secure control of the overland trade routes controlled by the Armenians that connected Europe to Asia. The policy of sufferance became a mechanism through which they were able to negotiate with the Armenian community, eventually reaching an agreement in which the Armenians were offered liberties 'as if they were English born', whereby they were to have 'free and undisturbed liberty of the exercise of their own Religion' across cities under English control (BL IOR, H/634 'Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation', June 22, 1688; see Ferrier 1971: 611–638). Furthermore, the English hoped that religious autonomy would encourage indigenous migration to their territories. Officials were particularly interested in the economic benefits of granting religious liberty to the people of Bombay. Henry Gary argued that by building 'pagados and mesquitas to excersise theyr religion publiquely', the English would transform Bombay into a 'very famous and opulent port' (Foster 1906–1927, XII: 51–52, Henry Gary to Lord Arlington, February 16/26, 1665). Temple building represented a physical sign to Catholics, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Armenians in Bombay and Madras that the English would 'suffer them to enjoy the exercise of their own religion without the least disruption or discountenance' (Foster 1906–1927, XI: 128). For example, at the same time that Gary advocated building temples and mosques for Hindus and Muslims in Bombay, he also wrote to Surat to suggest that land could be given to the Armenians for them to move to and build a 'church for the service of God' (Foster 1906–1927, XII: 63; Lieutenant Governor of Bombay Henry Gary to Lord Arlington, December 23, 1665). Through religious sufferance, it was hoped that the English would mirror the success of the Dutch in securing the loyalty of religiously cosmopolitan populations and thereby their position in Asia. Like the Dutch, Child argued that the English would gain control of cities in India through the adoption of religious sufferance. In doing so, the religious behaviour of Catholics, Jews, Armenians, Hindus, and Muslims would be controlled and, in the long run, offer the possibility of conversion through the use of passive evangelism. It

was in the religious cosmopolitan cities of India, such as Bombay and Madras, that the English attempted to develop this policy in order to not only secure control but also police, shape, and, eventually, convert the religious behaviour of their inhabitants.

In seventeenth-century Surat, Bombay, and Madras, religious sufferance did not, however, translate into religious understanding; instead, it often inflamed Protestant religious and cultural prejudices. From the late 1650s onwards, the transportation and enactment of English religious superstitions and prejudices led to a series of witchcraft trials and accusations. One of the first occasions of this occurred in 1650 when the president and agents at Surat complained about the behaviour of a Captain Durson, listing a series of misdemeanours, the most serious of which was his 'familiarity with witches and sorcerers' (Foster 1906–1927, XII: 283; President Merry and Messrs. Tash, Pearce, and Oxenden at Swally Marine to the Company, January 25, 1650). As in England, accusations of witchcraft in India were manifestations of institutional paranoia and concerns over the security of their authority in religiously cosmopolitan cities. The paranoia of the religiously cosmopolitan populations in cities like Bombay and Madras mixed with ignorance, unfamiliarity with local religious customs, and growing discontent among the local Indian population towards powerful elites supported by the English allowed for accusations of witchcraft to be magnified. In 1654, EIC officials in Madras received 51 charges against the Brahmins from local 'painters, weavers &c', the 36th of which accused the Brahmins of conducting harmful, 'charms, spells, roots and other witchcrafts' against any who spoke out against them (Foster 1906–1927, IX: 241–242, Charges against the Brahmins, given by the painters, weavers, &c. inhabiting Chanapatam, December 25, 1654).

Even English officials, worried about the growing power of local elites in Madras, accused them of witchcraft in order to damage their positions. William Jearsey, a company agent at Madras, paranoid about Beri Timmanna's growing power, accused him of being involved in witchcraft and employing 'people to bewitch me to death' (Foster 1906–1927, IX: 388, Accusations levelled by William Jearsey against a Mr. Winter, January 10, 1665). However, despite Jearsey's wishes to have him hanged, Timmanna was so powerful that even his accuser acknowledged, 'I know him so serviceable to them [i.e. the company] that I would not, for any self-interest out him out'(ibid.). In Bombay, the EIC court heard a case in which a 'noted wizard' was accused of murdering four people.[2] Once the person was convicted of the crime, the court wished to send a message that illustrated their power and authority in the city, sentencing that 'burning would be far the greatest terror', concluding bluntly, 'so we burnt him' (Anderson 1890: 403). Tragically, in this case, the letters sent back to the officials in Surat suggest that there were 'several as guilty as himself' imprisoned at the time for the same accusations, and that the 'country people bring in daily their complaints of their losses and abuses recorded by them' (ibid.). The accusation and trials around witchcraft illustrate how Protestant concepts were transported abroad into multi-faith environments

under English control. In these environments, this aggravated local religious and political tensions which, more often than not, had already been damaged by English attempts to establish secular and religious authority.

Surat, Bombay, and Madras in the seventeenth century presented Protestants with a number of challenges and opportunities that encouraged English officials in India to adapt the manner in which they engaged with their own faith, as well as others, in inventive and, often, resourceful ways. Unlike England's other commercial outposts in the Ottoman and Persian Empires, the territorial acquisition of large urban spaces in India meant that the EIC had to directly govern over religiously cosmopolitan environments. In order to engage with the demands of forming an administration beyond the traditional English factory, EIC leaders were forced to modify, to varying degrees, how they imposed Protestantism and engaged with other religions in Indian towns. In Bombay and Madras, English officials hoped that their 'piety and morality' would lead to a chain reaction. At first, it would 'refashion settlers into obedient and productive subjects', producing a well-ordered Protestant society that mirrored urban life in England (Stern 2011: 108). As EIC officials declared in Bombay, the establishment of Protestantism in the city had led to 'sobriety, religion, peace' in the city, ensuring that 'piety and virtue' was not only secured among themselves but also in the city as a whole (Foster 1906–1927, XIII: 249, General Letter, November 25, 1669). Once the 'piety' of English Protestants had been established, officials, both in India and in England, believed that it would eventually result in the conversion of various Indian communities into fellow Protestants loyal to the English. This process of passive evangelism was part of a long-term agenda that allowed the English to secure immediate concerns, such as commercial and political priorities, while continuing to keep an eye on the religious goal of spiritual and societal conversion within Indian cities.

Notes

1 For Madras statistics see Mentz 2005: 244. For Bombay, see BL IOR, E/3/36, 'A List of all the English both men and Women on the Island of Bombay together with a List of what men and Women are Deceased and the time for the space years past taken this 30 August 1675'; Stern 2011: 37.
2 See BL IOR, G/36/105, Bombay to Surat, May 18, 1671; Bombay to Surat, June 8, 1671; Bombay to Surat, June 24, 1671; Bombay to Surat, April 23, June 14, 1671; Anderson 1890: 90, 403–404, 'Appendix B, 'Burning of a Wizard at Bombay, 1671'. See also Stern 2011:109.

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5   Reconfiguring a lost trace

The Buddhist 'revival' movement in late-nineteenth-century Calcutta and the Bengal Buddhist Association

Parjanya Sen

A sustained interest in Buddhism marks the first half of the nineteenth century in Europe. In 1844, Eugène Burnouf asserted that the sacred books of Buddhists from Tibet, Tartary, and China were actually translations of older Sanskrit texts from India, thus affirming, as Brian Houghton Hodgson had done, the Indian origins of Buddhism (Almond 1986: 315, citing Burnouf 1844: 9). William Chambers established that a connection existed between Pali, first mentioned by Simon de la Loubère in *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam* (1693) and Sanskrit (Almond 1988: 26). The first translation of Xuanzang's life and works was by a French sinologist, Stanislas Julien, in 1857. The publication of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, a poetic life of Gautama Buddha subtitled *The Great Renunciation*, in 1879, and its immense popularity, follows upon these Orientalist textual engagements with Indian Buddhism: the work itself is a free adaptation of the *Lalitavistara* (see Arnold 1879). In the colony, this was manifested as archaeological interest. An obsession with Buddhist sites and antiquities marked the life and career of Alexander Cunningham, founder (1861) and first director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). James Prinsep's deciphering of the Brahmi script, which helped decode the Asokan edicts, and the translation of the *Mahavamsa*, a recorded history of Sri Lanka from 587 BCE to 236 CE, accompanied Cunningham's archaeological excavations and findings in India. Through these, the Buddha's image was recast, as Tapati Guha-Thakurta points out, 'from the status of a retrograde heathen god to the most humane and compassionate of religious reformers' (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 35). It may be easier to understand this colonial preoccupation with Indian Buddhism when one sees it as supported by a teleological civilizational framework which sought to posit India's Buddhist past as a 'grand golden age' paralleling ancient Greece. Subsequent to 'the grand Buddhist age', Indian civilization was seen as entering into teleological decline as against the perceived teleological ascendancy of Western civilization. It is perhaps this ranking of civilizations, implicated within a colonial desire to assert European supremacy over a now decadent India, that characterized much of the British preoccupation with Gandhara sculptures. Seen as stylistically continuous with classical forms, Gandhara Buddhist figures became cherished objects of colonial collection.

In the 1880s, this was followed by the restoration of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya by J. D. Beglar, archaeological surveyor and assistant to Cunningham (on British investment in this site, see Trevithick 2006). The nineteenth century witnessed a fierce contestation over the site between the *giri mahants*, a sect of Dasanami Shaivites who had occupied it from the end of the sixteenth century, and the South Asian Buddhists, who claimed to be the true custodians of the temple. A key figure within this attempt to reclaim Bodh Gaya for specifically Buddhist worship was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), a Sinhalese monk who came to Calcutta and founded the Maha Bodhi Society there in 1892 CE. Alan Trevithick has explored the monument's fascinating journey into modernity and the crucial role played by Anagarika Dharmapala in reclaiming the site. Trevithick points out that the British inter-vention in Bodh Gaya as 'a key property in the development of Indian archae-ology' had an 'ideological weight' born of the conviction that 'if much of India was an ancient rubble, much of that rubble had been the material of a Buddhist golden age from which contemporary India had declined'. This, argues Trevithick, provided the British imperialists with 'a morally compelling rationale for being in India in the first place' (Trevithick 2006: 13).

As this chapter will explore, the imperial interest in Indian Buddhism, which straddled the worlds of textual Orientalism, early antiquarian collecting of Buddhist objects, and subsequent archaeological and museological discourses, enabled and in turn was shaped by the revival movements which began in Calcutta towards the close of the nineteenth century. It is important to note, however, that forms of crypto-Buddhist practice had persisted throughout the intervening centuries between the Pala period of Buddhist dynastic rule in Bengal and the 'Buddhist revival' during colonial rule. Although a fuller inter-rogation of these practices lies outside the scope of this chapter, it was owing to the discursive imperatives of colonial historiography, viewing religions as disparate, bounded categories, as well as a newly fashioned nationalist histori-cal discourse, that the idea of the 'revival' of a supposedly 'dead' religion gained currency at the end of the nineteenth century.

I. The Calcutta chapter: The new passion for things Buddhist among Bengali intellectuals

In his diary entry of January 21, 1891, Anagarika Dharmapala writes, 'The Bengalees love Lord Buddha…. His blessed life has been dramatized and he therefore became popular among them. They call him Buddha Deva' (Trevithick 2006: 71). Some years later, the artist and writer Abanindranath Tagore, at a conference organized by the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association on October 26, 1907, stated, 'We have assem-bled here in this conference to remember the good virtues of Bhagavan Buddhadeva. Buddhadeva had conquered the world by love. If we perform our deeds following his footsteps, we must prosper' (cited in Chowdhury 1992: 22). At another occasion, on September 8, 1907, Abanindranath had exhorted the assembly:

The light of a lamp is temporary but the light which Buddha has shown will be burning for time immemorial. We are so ungrateful that we show our indifference to discuss the dhamma preached by Him. A great movement has taken place in the far-off Europe and America in the study and culture of Buddhism but we being the Indians have refrained from the study and discussion of Buddhism. This is a matter of great regret. Every Indian should strive his best for the development of Buddhism.

(Chowdhury 1992: 22)

Reading these two declamations side by side, one by a Sinhalese Buddhist determined to reclaim Bodh Gaya as a site exclusive to Buddhist worship and the other by a prominent Bengali artist and writer, both expressive of a common investment in reviving India's Buddhist past, I argue that this investment remains contingent upon several factors: colonial Orientalist discourses and archaeological excavations, the sociocultural and political milieu of Calcutta in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and an active Buddhist religious community that would establish itself in the metropolis of Calcutta.

The Buddha, originally seen as a dissident and heretic by Brahmanism, was, by the twelfth century CE, subsumed within a Brahmanical cosmology as the ninth avatar of Vishnu. Trevithick writes how the Maha Bodhi Society's attempt to 're-establish' Buddhism in India was rooted in the assumption that Buddhism was never really established in India in the first place, and therefore could not have disappeared; therefore, the Sinhalese claim was more untainted and 'authentic' (Trevithick 2006: 6). The Hindu mode of encompassment had already devised ways of assimilating the Buddha within its own elaborate cosmology. This was further complicated by a British imperialist mode of encompassment, as evident in the interventions of Cunningham, Beglar, and, later, Curzon, which sought to 'right a great "wrong"' (Trevithick 2006: 203–211). The British, suspicious of syncretic forms, were keen on neatly categorizing religions and their diverse modalities of practice, and it was perhaps this categorizing imperative which led one of Curzon's followers to refer to the 'Buddha as Vishnu-avatar' mode of encompassment as 'one of the most extraordinary perversions of which the Brahmin mind has been capable' (Trevithick 2006: 8). Anagarika himself, although initially well-disposed towards the Bengali appropriation of the Buddha as 'Buddha Deva' would soon become wary and irritable towards it, even as the Maha Bodhi Society's position vis-à-vis custodianship of Bodh Gaya would itself shift from an earlier direct enmity with the Hindus to a later more reconciliatory approach claiming both Buddhists and Hindus as 'brothers' and co-inheritors of an Aryan culture.

Trevor Ling reads the decline and disappearance of Buddhism from India and its revival within a framework of urbanism. Ling writes that by the eleventh century CE, the strong countercurrents of Vaishanava and Śakta cults, prevalent in what Ling terms 'rural Bengal' (villages rather than towns), displaced Buddhist ideas and practices that required a rational and predominantly urban disposition to flourish. According to Ling,

the increasingly rural context of life in Bengal in the Pala period may help to explain the eventual disappearance of any recognisable Buddhist tradition, at least from the surface of Bengali life. *Primarily urban in character, the Buddhist tradition could convey its characteristic educative influence to the villages so long as it retained a base within an urban setting.* In Pala Bengal that is what it gradually lost.

<div align="right">(Ling 1990: 18; my italics)</div>

Ling's formulation, despite its contentious polarizing of the rural/urban, manages to bring into question the myth of pan-Islamic conquest as responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India. It also explains how the milieu of the empire's new metropolis in Bengal was ideal for the shaping of a Buddhist revival movement. With regard to the Maha Bodhi Society and the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association, both founded in Calcutta in 1892 CE, Ling observes,

> These new forms which came into being in Calcutta in the last decade of the nineteenth century were not alternatives to the Buddhist Sangha, nor were they intended to replace it. Their emergence in the city did, however, indicate that there were functions which the Sangha by itself was less able to perform in a modern society. They represent the increasing part which began to be played by lay people from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, and these were almost always urban lay people.

<div align="right">(Ling 1990: 26)</div>

Many prominent intellectuals of the day, foremost among them Asutosh Mukherjee, but also Abanindranath Tagore, Satishchandra Vidyabhushan, Justice Saradacharan Mitra, Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy of Kasimbazar, Maharaja Bijoychand Mahatab of Burdwan, Jatindramohan Sengupta, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Bhupendrasree Ghosh, Nawab of Bagura Abdus Sobhanan Chowdhury, Hirendranath Dutta, Narendranath Sen, Charuchandra Basu, Bepinbehari Sanyal, and Harinath De were closely associated with the activities of the Dharmankur Sabha and the Maha Bodhi Society. Some among them, like the renowned chemist and educationist Prafulla Chandra Ray, went to the extent of seeing the disappearance of Buddhism from India as a direct result of Brahmanical antagonism. Ray asserts, 'The Brahmins have banished Buddhism from India – the present deplorable condition of India is due to that. To get back the lost glory of India, Buddhism which has been driven out should have to be brought back again' (Chowdhury 1992: 23). Ray's statement highlights how Buddhism was perceived as a rational alternative to Brahmanical casteism by many intellectuals and reformers of the time.

The Calcutta response to Buddhism in the late-nineteenth/ early twentieth centuries was split along three distinct registers – the first saw the participation of an active community of believers and worshippers who gathered in the city and established their institutions, the second appealed to a more

'secular' community of intellectuals and sympathizers viewing Buddhism as a lost faith needing to be revived out of a spirit of strong nationalism, and a third involving the community of scholars and pedagogues with both British and native players practising the new disciplines of colonial archaeology and textual studies. Each of these was contingent upon and mediated through the others. The Dharmankur Sabha and the Maha Bodhi society would time and again enlist the empathy and support of Bengali intellectuals, and prominent educationists such as Asutosh Mukherjee, second Indian vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, would likewise rely on the Dharmankur Sabha for inaugurating an academic and intellectual interest in India's Buddhist past.

The most conspicuous product of this liaison was the creation of a postgraduate Department of Pali at Calcutta University in 1907, under the vice-chancellorship of Asutosh Mukherjee (Sengupta 1986: 6), as well as the establishment of a Buddhist Students' Hostel at 46/7 Harrison Road, Calcutta. Pali had been part of the MA curriculum since 1889 (1882 in Banerjee 1957: 160), but this department, the first in India, would include teachers such as Dharmananda Kosambi, Satischandra Vidyabhushan, Rakhaldas Banerjee, Devadatta Ramakrishna Bhandarkar, Gokuldas De, Sunitikumar Chatterjee, Hemendrachandra Ray Chowdhury, Radhagovinda Basak, Bhagavanchandra Mahasthavir, K. Devarakshita, and Stella Kramrisch. In 1917–1918, it was placed under the Council of Post-Graduate Teaching in Arts at Calcutta University, and Edward Denison Ross commenced a Tibetan language course in what would later become the Department of Foreign Languages. The Pali department and its successors in other institutions, such as Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, Banaras Hindu University, Sampoornanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi, Nava-Nalanda Mahavihara, and Magadh University in Bodh Gaya, became centres of academic investment in Buddhist heritage.

These institutions, while colluding with the re-emergence of a community of devout Buddhists at various locations in India, also produced a transformation of sorts – from Buddhism as active faith to Buddhism as an object of philosophical and historical enquiry. Here we witness a kind of semantic shift, where a language becomes the bearer of religious scholarship and, by extension, of the religion itself. Such transfer, from active religion to an academic investment in linguistic studies, saw the active participation not merely of the Bengali middle class of the time but also national and international personalities. The transition of Buddhism from spheres of worship to linguistic scholarship becomes even more pronounced when we take a look at the MA syllabus of the newly established Department of Pali at the University of Calcutta. A draft syllabus that was prepared in 1906 included four papers, only one of which (Paper III) actually studied the grammar and the language (Sengupta 1986: 7). The rest are dedicated to Theravada religious texts, such as the *Sutta-Pittaka, Vinaya Pittaka*, and *Abhidhamma Pittaka* and the history of Buddhism in India. A special paper on Mahayana Buddhism was introduced as part of the curriculum, following a revision of the syllabus in 1917 (Banerjee 1957: 161). This paper included prose and poetry sections

from the Mahayana texts, the *Jatakas*, selected readings from Madhyamika and Yogachara philosophy, as well as a section on Buddhist *nyaya*. As Sukumar Sengupta notes, 'Thus the division of the post-graduate course in Pali into four groups was sufficiently justified by the impetus given thereby to the systemic study of Buddhism, Abhidhamma and Mahayana in particular' (Sengupta 1986: 10). What began as a linguistic enquiry thus underwent a semantic shift to become the metonym of Buddhist studies itself, as it was institutionalized within the University of Calcutta.

The robust body of Buddhist scholarship which flourished during this period drew upon, but was not restricted to, the colonial modalities of engagement with things Buddhist – as a 'dead' glorious past which needed to be systemically excavated and studied, especially through the newly established discipline of archaeology. Within the paired disciplines of archaeology and Indology, figures such as Nalini Kanta Bhattashali, Rajendralal Mitra, Rakhaldas Banerjee, and Akshay Kumar Maitreya played a decisive role in establishing a network of excavation, documentation, and custodianship of Buddhist antiquities. This transition from the colonial to the national and its chequered relationship with Buddhist sites and antiquities is well-known to historians. In fact, Rakhaldas Banerjee, throughout his career, was simultaneously negotiating with an archaeological scientificity, a product of his location within the ambit of colonial archaeology, and at the same time staking a nationalist claim, especially through the domain of ficto-historical writing (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 112–139). Banerjee's *Pashaner Katha*, serialized between 1910 and 1911 in the initial issues of the journal *Aryavarta*, is a metonymic retelling of Buddhism by the *stupa* of Bharhut, the narrator of the story. The story, firmly implicated within the framework of an emergent Bengali nationalism, attempts to unearth a pre-Islamic glorious Bengali past, with the Muslim conquests 'serving as the cathartic cutoff point in the nation's autonomous past'. Islamic rule is seen as synonymous with a 'dark age', an age of ravage and plunder, when the *stupa* 'loses contact with light and the human world' and 'the nation's history also goes into darkness and freezes, until a new group of *Yavanas* (the British) retrieves the ruins and unravels its lost history' (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 138). Thus what emerges in late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century Calcutta is a history of investments in India's Buddhist past, split along separate but interdependent registers. Such investments variously co-opted the Bengali intellectual and, in Rakhaldas Banerjee's case, became an inalienable part of his articulation of a historical Bengali identity.

Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with Buddhism deserves more space than the scope of this chapter will allow. Rajendralal Mitra, an Indologist working under the ambit of the ASI, published a detailed illustrated report on Bodh Gaya in 1878 (prior to Beglar's restoration of the monument). He also published *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* in 1882 and translated sections of the *Lalitavistara* and the *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita* (1888). Mitra's *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* would go on to become the source of Rabindranath Tagore's stories in *Katha O Kahini* (1908)

some of which Tagore would later develop into his dance-dramas. For instance, Tagore's dance-drama *Chandalika* (1938), based upon one of the stories in *Katha O Kahini*, documents the tale of a girl belonging to an 'untouchable' caste and her eventual redemption through an encounter with the Buddhist monk, Ananda. The figure is likely a reference to Ananda, the Buddha's closest disciple within the Buddhist canon. Tagore's works have, in many ways, served to locate the image of the Buddha as a compassionate reformer within the middle-class Hindu Bengali consciousness. As early as 1859, his father Debendranath Tagore, with his son Satyendranath, and his colleague Keshab Chandra Sen travelled to Sri Lanka and were deeply moved by Sinhalese Buddhist practices. Krishna Bihari Sen, brother of Keshab Chandra, wrote his *Buddhadevacharita*, which was serially published between 1891–1892 in the Tagore family journal, *Sadhana*. Keshab Chandra Sen was a Brahmo practitioner, and in his *Budhhadevacharita*, Krishna Bihari writes, 'Brahmoism is a protest against caste, idolatry and superstitions, and a rise and progress of rationalism in the East. It started with the spirit of Buddhism' (Barua 1991: 5).

It is interesting to note here that new religious reformist movements in Bengal, such as Brahmoism, were, at least initially, influenced by what the intellectual Bengali perceived as Buddhism. This perceived and received Buddhism was itself largely a fashioning, one which overwhelmingly drew upon a colonial historiographic positioning of the Buddha as a crusader against a degenerate Brahmanism, riddled with caste hierarchies. Such a fashioning never really took into consideration the complex interactions between modes of Buddhist practice and Tantric Hinduism in Pala-period Bengal. Krishna Bihari Sen's book was adapted into a play by Girish Chandra Ghosh and saw many successful performances on the Calcutta stage. The nationalist Nabin Chandra Sen wrote a poetic invocation to the Buddha titled 'Amitabha'. Popular Bengali journals of the time such as *Prabasi* and *Bangadarshan* published scholarly essays by authors such as Vidhusekhar Sastri and Sarat Chandra Ray on Buddhism (see Barua 1991). The figure of the Buddha and a discursive appropriation of his life and teachings were thus firmly implanted within the minds of the urban middle-class Hindu Bengali by the close of the nineteenth century. Within such an imagination, Buddhism was viewed as an alternative to Brahmanical casteism, becoming synonymous with a civic religion of sorts, symbolic of a 'dead' past that needed to be recovered and invested with new meanings.

II. Spilling over onto the visual register: New meanings and old structures

This Buddhist resurgence in the colonial capital did not remain restricted to the scholarly and the archaeological but spilled over to the visual and architectural registers. This becomes apparent when we examine the construction of the Dharmarajika Mahavihara, which would go on to become the headquarters of the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta. Locating the Calcutta

Vihara within an attempt by the Maha Bodhi Society and Anagarika Dharmapala to reclaim and re-sacralize the Bhattiprolu relics, Sraman Mukherjee writes,

> The aspirations of neo-Buddhist reformist associations like the Maha Bodhi Society, its programme of reform and revival of Buddhism as a practicing faith and reclamation and re-consecration of ancient Buddhist sites and objects, though not always sharing the same historicist commitment of archaeology and museums, drew, to a large extent, on the same authenticating desires of these colonial disciplines and institutions.
>
> (Mukherjee 2014: 16)

The colonial government would become increasingly embroiled within what can be read as a new 'relic diplomacy' revolving around these neo-Buddhist organizations. Mukherjee notes how this 'interplay' between relics and archaeological ruins mark the 'tortuous negotiations between, and the fraught passages from the spaces of the archaeological conserved sites and the galleries of museums to the sanctums of newly constructed practising Buddhist temples' (Mukherjee 2014: 2–3). Mukherjee explores the 'cultural biography' of the Bhattiprolu Relic, excavated in 1892 by Alexander Rea at Bhattiprolu in the Krishna District of the then Madras Presidency and identified from the Brahmi inscription on the rock-crystal casket which enclosed it, as part of the Buddha's cranium. The objects were promptly transferred to the Madras Museum where they remain housed till 1921. The colonial government turned down a proposal by the Government of Madras to gift these relics as part of diplomatic negotiations with the king of Siam. The ASI backed the claims of the Maha Bodhi Society and Dharmapala against the Madras Museum, which refused to display corporeal relics but wanted to display the rock-crystal reliquary as a museological object. The Madras Museum was willing to part with the relics but not with the casket. A new casket had to be manufactured by Messrs. Hamilton and Co. to house the relics, and, eventually, the Bhattiprolu Relic (sans the casket which remained with the Madras Museum) travelled to the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta.

The new vihara in Calcutta, the headquarters of the Maha Bodhi Society, sought to legitimize itself by replicating a much older Buddhist monument, the Chaitya Hall at Karle, Ajanta Caves (see Figure 5.1). As Mukherjee examines in his essay, we observe here the process of articulating a neo-Buddhist identity through the inscription of new meaning upon ancient, archaeologically rediscovered forms. In 1916, with the British government announcing that the Bhattiprolu relics would be entrusted to the Maha Bodhi Society as well as the Bengal Buddhist Association, Dharmapala began a campaign to raise funds for a new vihara in Calcutta to house the relics, a structure which he projected on the model of ancient Buddhist architecture. Mukherjee explores the involvement of the colonial government, particularly the ASI and its then director-general, John Marshall, in the plan, with the suggestion for the architecture of the new vihara

Figure 5.1 The Dharmarajika Mahavihara, headquarters of the Maha Bodhi Society
in Calcutta (photograph by author).

apparently coming from Marshall himself. Marshall instructed J. A. Page,
then Superintendent of the Mohammedan and British monuments of the
Northern Circle of the ASI, to produce a design, and he himself contributed
significantly to Page's work (Mukherjee 2014: 17–18). But feuds between the
Maha Bodhi Society, the Bengal Buddhist Association, and the Burmese
Buddhists eventually caused Marshall and the ASI to distance themselves
from the construction of the new vihara. Page and Marshall's designs were
subsequently modified by Percy Brown, principal of the Government School
of Art in Calcutta, who was approached for the purpose by Dharmapala.
Clay models of the new vihara, differing significantly from Page's design,
were made by Mr. Acharya, the modelling teacher at the school, under
Brown's direction but publicized under Marshall's name. This further
enraged the director-general, causing him to completely distance himself
from the construction. The building was eventually completed in 1920 under
the supervision of civil architect Mono Mohan Ganguly (Mukherjee 2014:
24). The Bhattiprolu relics were handed over to the Society's then-president
Asutosh Mukherjee on the occasion of the building's inauguration in 1921
by the governor of Bengal, Lord Ronaldshay.

Thus while neo-Buddhist organizations such as the Maha Bodhi Society
sought to legitimize themselves by drawing upon ancient Buddhist architec-
tural idioms and assuming custodianship of relics uncovered by archaeolo-
gists, the visual register was itself contingent upon developments in
pedagogical and intellectual circles, as well as the domain of active Buddhist
worship. A figure like that of Asutosh Mukherjee, for instance, straddled
these multiple registers as well as different subject positions: as vice-chancel-
lor of Calcutta University responsible for inaugurating its Department of
Pali and as president of the Maha Bodhi Society. The high respect in which
Buddhism was held in Calcutta's academic and nationalist circles is further

reflected by a major urban monument to nationalist science, the Bose Institute or Basu Vijnan Mandir, dedicated in 1917 by Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose. It incorporated both Hindu and Buddhist motifs into its red sandstone structure. Designed by the young architect A. N. Mitter, this building is almost exactly contemporary to the Dharmarajika Mahavihara.

III. Practising Buddhists and the colonial city: Interrogating the role of the Bengal Buddhist Association and Kripasaran Barua

A figure in many ways as significant as Anagarika Dharmapala was Kripasaran Barua (1865–1926) of Chittagong, who established the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association in 1892 in the Bowbazar area of north Calcutta. Kripasaran Barua was born on June 22, 1865, to Aradhana and Anandakumar Barua at Uninepura, Chittagong. He was initiated into the life of a Buddhist monk at a young age by Sudhachandra Mahathera of Uninepura.[1] It was at this time that Kripasaran came into contact with important Buddhist figures who headed the Theravada reform movement in Chittagong, such as Saramedha Mahathera and Punnachara Mahathera, who had settled in Uninepura after returning from Sri Lanka. These figures had a profound influence on Kripasaran's life and ideas. It was Punnachara who in 1885 ordained the 20-year-old Kripasaran as a *bhikkhu* or monk and gave him the name 'Chandrajyoti', although Kripasaran chose to abide by the birth name given by his parents.

The initial phase of Kripasaran's life shares many similarities with that of Dharmapala. On his visit to Bodh Gaya, where he was accompanying Punnachara on a pilgrimage tour of the Buddhist sites of India, Kripasaran received inspiration under the Bodhi tree. Arriving in Calcutta aged 21, he settled down at a small vihara in a rented house, home to a few hundred mendicant Chittagong Buddhists, and eventually founded the association known as the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha. The later part of his career, however, is different from Dharmapala's. Whereas Dharmapala became embroiled in a series of legal and diplomatic negotiations with the British, the Hindus, and the Bengali intellectuals of the time, Kripasaran spent most of his life trying to spread Buddhism by establishing schools, Buddhist centres of learning and viharas throughout parts of Northern and Eastern India. These proselytizing activities saw the foundation of a series of new viharas throughout the region. By the first half of the nineteenth century, Kripasaran had succeeded in constructing as many as seven new viharas at Lucknow (1907), Shimla (1907), Dibrugarh (1908), Ranchi (1915), Darjeeling (1919), Shillong (1923), and Jamshedpur (1924) and restored the older ones in the Chittagong district – Noapara (restored in 1913), Uninepura and Rangamati (both 1921). The details of Kripasaran's travels and proselytizing activities in India can be obtained from a manuscript in Bengali dated 19 April 1906, dictated by the unlettered Kripasaran to his nephew, Tarani Sen Barua, containing Kripasaran's will, as well as copies of all the land acquisition deeds for the various viharas he constructed throughout India. Three copies of the

dictated manuscript were written down by Tarani Sen Barua and Joybhadra Chowdhury. One copy was given to the Chintamani Library of the Anath Bazar vihara in Chittagong, one to the Gunalankar Library of the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, and the third was retained by Tarani Sen Barua. Of these, I was able to locate the last two.

What we see unfolding through Kripasaran's proselytizing mission and the travels of his neo-Buddhist organization – i.e. the Bengal Buddhist Association – across different parts of Northern and Eastern India over the first two decades of the twentieth century, to build these new viharas, is a new spatial map of the Buddhist resurgence movement. While Dharmapala's later career revolved around the reclamation of Buddhist sites, Kripasaran's later career, as well as the travels of the Bengal Buddhist Association, saw the mapping of a new cultural geography of Theravada Buddhism in the regions he traversed.

The Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association was established on 5 October 1892, in Calcutta. For the first seven years or so, the association did not own any property in the city and the *bhikkhus* primarily lived and operated from a rented house which they named Mahanagar Vihara located on 21/16 Bowbazar Street (Mahasthavira 1906: 20–21). On 1 January 1900, Kripasaran managed to purchase three *kathas* of land on Babu Lalit Mohan Das Lane at Kapalitola in the Bowbazar area of Calcutta from a certain Rurmal Goenka, son of Showbun Goenka of 7, Bustollah Street, for a sum of 2,900 rupees (Mahasthavira 1906: 20–21). One *katha* of land adjacent to this was purchased by Kripasaran from a certain Sangri Saudagar for a sum of 1,300 Rupees (Mahasthavira 1906: 24). In 1903, construction began on the new *Vihara* in Lalit Mohan Das Lane with the laying of its foundation stone. In 1905, on the day of *purnima* (full moon) in the month of July, a white marble image of Buddha was enshrined within the vihara. In 1916, when Lord Carmichael was Governor of Bengal, the lane where the Dharmankur Sabha and Mahanagar Vihara were located was renamed Buddhist Temple Street, following the success of a proposal sent to the government. Additionally, another five *kathas* of land then valued at 10,000 rupees were gifted by the Maharaja of Kasimbazar to the Bengal Buddhist Association (Chowdhury 1992: 18). As indicated earlier, this shows not only an active colonial interest and participation in the activities of these neo-Buddhist associations and communities but also a network of support and empathy drawing in both British and native Bengali actors.

Information regarding the Dharmankur Sabha's *modus operandi* can be obtained from their monthly Bengali journal *Jagajjyoti*. The first issue was published on *Guru-purnima*, the full moon day of *Ashadh* (June–July) 1908 CE (2452 Buddhist Era) under the editorship of Gunalankar Mahathera, vice-president of the Sabha, and Samana Purnananda, a Pali lecturer at Calcutta University. Later, after the demise of Gunalankar, Benimadhab Barua, the first Asian to earn a D. Litt at the University of London, would take up the editorship of the journal, published monthly until 1919 and

revived in 1950. The name 'Jagajjyoti' itself derives from a translation of Arnold's *Light of Asia* by Sarbananda Barua of Chittagong, first published in *Bauddha Bandhu*, a Buddhist journal from Chittagong. We may note, thus, how the Dharmankur Sabha's journal draws its lineage directly from the nineteenth-century Orientalist textual framing of Buddhism, while Arnold and Dharmapala were in turn deeply influenced by the Sinhalese monk Weligama Sri Sumangala Thero.

The first issue of the journal begins with an appeal in the form of a poem. The appeal is addressed, in two separate parts, to the 'citizens of Bengal' (*Bangabashi*) and the 'followers of Buddha' (*Bauddha-gan*)—

> To the *Bangabashi*—
> I have come
> To your doorstep,
> My name 'Jagajjyoti';
> Amidst the darkness of ignorance
> Within the being afflicted by *maya*
> To show the light of the Dhamma.
>
> To the *Bauddha-gan*—
> Sleep no more
> Buddhist brethren
> Shed your slumber's pall;
> The good morrow
> Has arisen
> The melancholy moonless night shall stall.
> Recall in your mind
> Those times past
> When happiness and wealth abound;
> In slumber you lay
> Night and day,
> Now see the misery around.

> (*Jagajjyoti* 1908: 1–2; my translation)

The poem, metaphorically linking the journal to the Sabha, splits its address across two audiences, practising Buddhists and the non-Buddhist Bengalis. In many ways, it becomes synonymous with the twofold function of the Dharmankur Sabha and the adjacent Dharmankur Vihara. Whereas the vihara was specifically a space for Buddhist practitioners, the Sabha emerged as a far more dynamic space facilitating the emergence of a network of diverse interests and vested players from different sections of Bengali society.

In the 'Opinions and News' section of the third (*Bhadra*) issue of *Jagajjyoti*, the acquisition of a two-storied building at 41/5 Beniapukur Lane in Calcutta for a price of 1,100 rupees by Anagarika Dharmapala was announced. The news item, entitled 'Calcutta's New *Vihara*', mentions that despite the

continued perseverance, over 15 to 16 years, of the Maha Bodhi Society in attempting to free the sacred site of Bodh Gaya from the clutches of non-believers, it had had no permanent location in the city of Calcutta, conducting its activities from the offices of the Dharmankur Sabha. The report states that an ancient image of the Buddha had been established in this new vihara and that this proposed vihara of the Maha Bodhi Society would have a separate library, a working office, and quarters for the monks. We see here the coming together of diverse strands of active communities of Buddhist practice, a process aided by imperial transnational networks. Whereas the Maha Bodhi Society sought to fashion itself as an international Buddhist organization, facilitated by Dharmapala's own politics with their transcontinental reach, the Dharmankur Sabha's major concern remained the Bengali Buddhist or Barua Buddhist community, which it sought to locate by reclaiming a nationalist past. It should be remembered here that although initially the relationship between the Dharmankur Sabha and the Maha Bodhi Society was a cordial one, contestations over the custodianship of India's ancient Buddhist past soon emerged. The same contestation was evident in the case of the Bhattiprolu relics mentioned earlier. Further, the Barua Buddhists actively sought to distance themselves from Arakan Buddhism, asserting a direct lineage to ancient Indian Buddhism. This would, of course, put them in a better position than their Sinhalese counterparts to claim custodianship of India's Buddhist past.

The eighth (*Magh*) edition contains an article by Jyotirindranath Tagore, elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, where he projects Buddhism as a 'scientific' philosophy. Jyotirindranath writes that in two aspects, Buddhist philosophy, 'wherein *kamma* cannot be transferred from father to son (as with Brahminism)' 'resembles modern scientific temperament – oneness of the Universal and pluralism of the Selves (*Atma*)' (*Jagajjyoti* 1909: 185). It is interesting how Buddhism, as a philosophical discourse, is interpreted here as synonymous with scientificity and rationality, opening up a discursive strand of immense import to the Bengali intellectual middle class, especially those who were critical of the casteist practices of a hegemonic Brahmanism.

The publication of *Jagajjyoti* itself needs to be located within this framework of nationalism and a burgeoning nationalist print culture in Calcutta in the early twentieth century. A slew of Swadeshi endeavours and associations such as the Swadeshi Bandhav Samiti of Ashwini Kumar Dutta in Barishal, together with a thriving nationalist print industry that included journals such as Satishchandra Mukherjee's *Dawn*, Bipin Chandra Pal's *New India*, Aurobindo Ghosh's *Bande Mataram*, Brahmobandhab Upadhyay's *Sandhya*, Bhupendranath Dutta's *Yugantar*, Prajnasundari Devi's *Purna*, and the fortnightly magazine *Alapani* edited by Manmathanath Dey, provided an ambience conducive to the inclusion of a Buddhist past within a projected nationalist imaginary. Against the backdrop of Hindu-Muslim riots, most prominently the one at Comilla immediately prior to the first publication of *Jagajjyoti*, the Dharmankur Sabha, through the medium of its journal,

sought to position itself within a tradition of neutrality and non-violence that was seen as synonymous with ancient Indian Buddhism.

In this tradition, Kripasaran's image was fashioned as a renouncer, someone who, at a very young age, had left the structure of familial life behind and dedicated himself to the cause of Buddhism. An unlettered person, without the international reach of Dharmapala, Kripasaran was nevertheless hailed as a great reformer who instilled the Buddhist revivalist spirit within the Bengali mind. Silananda Brahmachari in his brief hagiography of Kripasaran entitled *Karmayogi Kripasaran*, published in Bengali in 1965 by the Dharmankur Sabha, writes,

> When the whole of India was ablaze with the flame of renaissance, it was at this moment that the renuciant Karmabir Kripasaran's arrival instilled new life within Bengal's Buddhist society and heralded a new era of Buddhist revival in India. To this Buddhist society plagued by superstitions, lacking in unanimity and self-confidence and battered by infinite persecutions, this brave *bhikkhu* revealed a new path and re-ignited the lamp of Buddhism in India.
>
> (Brahmachari 1965: 1; translation mine)

A further commemoration of Kripasaran occurred through the commissioning and installation of a white marble statue of him during his lifetime. On 31 October 1916, this statue, designed by an Italian sculptor, was installed within the premises of the Dharmankur Vihara with a plaque engraved in Bengali and English praising his life and activities. The occasion of the installation of Kripasaran's statue was attended by prominent personalities associated with the Sabha, such as Asutosh Mukherjee, Satishchandra Vidyabhusan, Sachindranath Mukhopadhyay, Tinkari Mukhopadhyay, and Anagarika Dharmapala. Dharmapala's tribute to Kripasaran on the occasion points to the transcontinental network of alliance between Buddhists, despite their oft-contesting claims over custodianship of relics:

> We have all gathered here to pay our respect to Kripasaran Mahasthavira. Almost thirty years ago, he had arrived in this city from East Bengal, just as I had arrived here from Sinhala. He had come from the east, and I from the south, with the same purpose. Our goal is undifferentiated. On this occasion, I, on behalf of all Sinhalese Buddhists, pay my humble homage and respect to him.
>
> (Chowdhury 1990: 79)

The marble statue was placed immediately adjacent to the image of Buddha (it has been subsequently shifted; see Figure 5.2).[2] This positioning of Kripasaran's image further underscores the fashioning of his subjectivity as a devoted follower, almost a *bodhisattva* of sorts. The Dharmankur Sabha, while locating its claims within a larger nationalist imaginary, thus attempted to insert itself and its founder within this projection of a Buddhist past. While drawing upon existing colonial narratives of Buddhism as representative of

Figure 5.2 Marble statue of Kripasaran placed adjacent to Buddha at the Dharmankur Sabha/Bengal Buddhist Association (photograph by author).

India's 'grand past', it simultaneously sought to claim a direct genealogy from that past and position itself as its inheritor and custodian.

Kripasaran's journey, as a person who remained unlettered throughout his life, unfolds in the form of a fascinating narrative, commencing from a rural community in Chittagong and ending in his urban deification next to the Buddha, an event that occurred within his very lifetime. This narrative straddles the worlds of colonial enquiry into Buddhism, the revival movement and late-nineteenth/early twentieth century Calcutta, and the realms of active faith and secular interest in things Buddhist. It is pitched against the backdrop of Curzon's failure to preserve Bodh Gaya as a purely archaeological site and to bring it within the purview of the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904. If Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi Society sought to foreground what was primarily a Sinhalese claim vis-à-vis the larger fashioning of an authentic global Buddhist voice, Kripasaran and the Dharmankur Sabha's discourse of local Buddhism sought to consolidate and articulate the claim of the Barua Buddhists of Chittagong.

This local Buddhism, posited against the larger imaginary of a nationalist past, received the sympathetic endorsement of contemporary Bengali intellectuals. But in order to do so, it had to arrive in the city, like Kripasaran himself: it had to make use of new urban networks of education and politics and leave its imprint on the city's visual map. The commonality of investment in things Buddhist was shared by the colonizers, the Bengali intellectuals, and these neo-Buddhist organizations, despite their contesting positions and claims. It managed to formulate and mould these new afterlives of Buddhism in and from Bengal's new metropolis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is worth recalling this complex metropolitan history, with its antiquarian, nationalist, and revivalist registers, in the context of both Anagarika Dharmapala's Sinhalese 'Buddhist modernism' and the neo-Buddhism, Dalit

Buddhism, or *Navayana* proposed by the great Indian reformer and jurist B. R. Ambedkar half a century later (Ambedkar 1957; McMahan 2008).

Notes

1 Bordering the Arakan kingdom of Burma, the hill tracts of Chittagong had retained some vestiges of Mahayana Buddhist practice among the Barua, Chakma, and Marma indigenous communities throughout the six centuries between the Pala period of Buddhist dynastic rule in Bengal and the nineteenth century resurgence movements. In 1856 CE, a Theravada revival was initiated by Rani Kalindi of the Chakmas and Saramedha or Saramitta Mahathera of Burma. Saramedha ordained many *raulis* or monks (who had adopted marriage and domesticity, merely donning their Buddhist robes or *chibara* to officiate at occasions such as births, deaths, and weddings). The *raulis* who were reordained into Theravada formed the Sangharaja Nikaya ('order of monks'). Those who refused ordination were simply known as 'Mather Dali'. At some later point, they brought about their own Theravada reformation, unaided by Arakan influence, and established the Mahasthavira Nikaya. Kalindi also initiated the publication of books in Bengali on Buddhism, the most important of these being *Bauddharanjika* compiled by a Brahman, Nil Kamal Das (hand-picked by the Rani herself) published from Chittagong in 1890 after Kalindi's death. Kripasaran belonged to the reformed Sangharaja Nikaya and was directly influenced as a boy by Saramedha and his disciple and the next Sangharaja, Punnachara Mahathera. For the Theravada reform movement in Chittagong, see Chaudhuri 1994.
2 A bronze image of the Buddha modelled on the Chandrasara Mahamuni image at Mandalay, Myanmar, was sent to Calcutta by the Buddhists of Arakan and enshrined as the central image at the Bengal Buddhist Association.

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6   From Faridpur to Calcutta
The journey of the Matua faith

Sipra Mukherjee

The small religious sect of the Matuas was born in rural Bengal, an eastern province of colonial India, towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The British Crown was then just beginning to take over as the imperial rulers from the East India Company, a transformation which Tagore described as the '*baniker mandanda*' changing to the '*rajdanda*': the trader's scales metamorphosing into the royal sceptre. Amid the 'flux and turmoil of rapid political, social and economic change in Bengal' (Oddie 1995: 328), and inspired by the egalitarian Vaishnava and Sufi doctrines of itinerant preachers who passed through these areas (Chakraborty 2003: 31), a number of small religious sects arose in the eastern districts of the Bengal province. In the Faridpur district, Harichand Biswas of the Chandal caste defied Brahmanical Hinduism to begin the new faith of Matua *dharma*. The Chandals were what was known as an 'untouchable' caste, situated low on the caste hierarchy and bearing the stigma of low-caste concomitant pollution. Harichand's Matua dharma spread within his community through the vibrant oral tradition since the Chandals were unlettered at this time. Indeed, literacy was forbidden to the lower castes and women of all castes in mid-nineteenth-century Bengal. But the culture of *sankirtan* and *kavi-gān* of rural Bengal enabled the Matua community to spread, building bridges across the marshy spaces of Faridpur and Bakarganj, bonding over emotions and protests through the songs and oral narratives. It was when Harichand's grandson Sashi Bhushan Thakur arrived in Calcutta for higher education that the sect had its first real brush with the urban space. Sashi Bhushan expressed a desire to convert to the Brahmo faith.

Sashi Bhusan's father, Guruchand, originally named Gurucharan (Thakur 1994: 81) had, almost single-handedly, gathered a substantial section of the Bengali Chandals into the Matua dharma and had also succeeded, through the Census of 1911, in shedding the much-denigrated name 'Chandal' to take on the name 'Namasudra'. Guruchand, whose business required him to visit the city of Calcutta about two to four times every year (Thakur 1994: 4), had realized early that it was western education that would help in enabling his son to get ahead in life. Pramatha Ranjan Thakur, Guruchand's grandson, writes in his *Atmacharit ba Purbasmriti*,

At that time, the new system of Western education was becoming increasingly popular in Calcutta. All the important people and the newspapers said the same thing, that without Western education, Bengali education would not get anyone anywhere. In those days, the immediate benefit of English education was that it made it easy for one to get a job under the English government. Every educated Bengali at that time thought of *chakri* (employment) as something to be proud of.

(Thakur 1994: 5)

Guruchand's keen desire that his son receive western education was finally fulfilled through Sashi Bhushan's marriage into the family of the 'famous Chandshi doctor Padmalochan Das' (ibid.: 7). Having completed school at Cotton Institution, Sashi Bhushan went on to teach there after a short break. It was during this period of his life that Sashi Bhushan met the Brahmo leaders Sibnath Shastri and Nagendra Nath Chatterjee who, his son writes, 'helped the common Hindu rid his mind of mistaken orthodoxy' (ibid.: 11). Sashi Bhushan was also attracted to the Theosophical Society in Calcutta and attended some of its lectures. On hearing of Sashi Bhushan's intention to convert to the Brahmo faith, Guruchand advised his son to return from the city of Calcutta and to desist being a foreigner (*videshi*) to his own community. Sashi was ordered to return home and work for 'his people': '*nija jati*' (Haldar 1943: 349). This Sashi did, returning to Orakandi to teach in the village school.

The past and the present

Despite this journey undertaken by Sashi Bhushan to his '*nija jati*', from the city to the village, the Matua community would see large-scale movement in the opposite direction within a few decades. Sporadically and in very small numbers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and then in huge numbers after 1947, subcontinental history compelled a large community of the Matuas to move from the rural expanses of Barishal, Faridpur, and Bakarganj to a diverse array of rural, suburban, and urban locations in India. While the movement before the Partition of India had been entirely voluntary, necessitated by employment or higher education, the later movement was precipitated by the violence and fear that accompanied the gaining of India's independence on the eastern and western borders of the country. For that section of the Matua community which moved across the border to settle in and around the city of Calcutta, now Kolkata, this move necessitated strategic negotiations since it brought them into proximity to the social, political, and religious mainstreams. While the upheaval called Partition has meant the experience of uprooting and displacement for this Matua community, it has also meant that the 'little tradition' of the Matua dharma has, in the faith's newfound context of the city, been placed within the urban sphere with its concomitant values of modernity and progress. The Thakur family and other Matuas settled in Gaighata, naming their settlement Thakurnagar, 'the first

Dalit refugee colony in India started by an independent Dalit initiative' (Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2014: 13; 'Dalit', literally 'down-trodden', is a term for oppressed castes in India). Thakurnagar is now a town with a railway station, 63 km north-east of Kolkata in North 24-Parganas. Other Matuas settled in Kakdwip, Howrah, Machlandapur, Mukundapur, Hooghly, Barasat, the Sundarbans, and elsewhere. Though bewildered and vulnerable in the first decades after Partition, many among the Matua community in Kolkata have since picked up the broken fragments of their lives so far as possible after the violent uprooting that left them distraught, helpless, and impoverished. After settling in makeshift huts beside the city's sewage canals or in far-flung inhospitable suburbs, and after finding some means of sustenance, the community was able to turn its attention to culture.

The first Dalit literary convention was held in West Bengal in 1987 through the efforts of many, including Nakul Mallick and Ranendra Lal Biswas. The Bangiya Dalit Lekhak Parishad was established at this convention with its journal *Dalit Kantha*, to be followed within a few years by Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sangstha in 1992 with its journal *Chaturtha Duniya* in 1994. Significantly, this Sangstha was established as a platform of protest in reaction to the tragic death of the Adivasi student Chuni Kotal, driven to suicide by the discrimination and the 'casual violence' she was subjected to at her university. The first issue of *Chaturtha Duniya*, dedicated to Chuni Kotal, included her writings, a beginning that effectively opened up the Sangstha to all vulnerable communities, including the Dalits. Writers featured by it are from both Dalit and Adivasi communities of Bengal. Dalit writers of the Matua faith, or from families following the Matua dharma, who are associated with these journals far outnumber other writers, intellectuals, and activists linked to it. It does appear irrelevant to religious affiliations in this context since their activities were and are what would be largely described as 'secular'. The qualifying 'largely' is necessary since they also publish a few texts on the Matua dharma. The division between the secular and the religious found in most modern publishing houses is absent here. This is evident also in the figure of Manohar Mouli Biswas who is both president of the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sangstha and chairperson of the Matua 24 Parganas (South) District Committee. Coming from a devout Matua family, Biswas does not see any conflict between his two roles, one secular and the other religious, saying, 'We draw our ideology and strength to fight for justice and our rights from the Matua dharma'.[1]

The editorial board for their journal *Chaturtha Duniya* was also structured in keeping with this vision of protest, to include all oppressed communities. Though inspired by Maharashtra's Dalit movement, Biswas says, 'We wanted to build the Dalit movement of Bengal on a unique foundation'. Thus the chief editor was Achintya Biswas from the Dalit community, but three associate editors were Manohar Mouli Biswas from the Dalit community, Mondal Hembram from the Adivasi community, and Susnata Jana from the Other Backward Communities. Occupying a tiny stall on Bhawani Dutta Lane off Kolkata's famous College Street, once the haunt of the city's intellectuals,

the publishing house of *Chaturtha Duniya* opens its shutters after office hours every week. The stall is stacked to the limit with books and journals, serving as a meeting space for veteran and young intellectuals, activists, writers, and a growing community of readers. This chapter will take up the trajectory of the Matua community as it moved from a marginal, rural location to an urban space, becoming more visible and far more populous in the process.

Coming closer to the city

Though Sashi Bhushan's visit to Calcutta was the first significant physical connection that the Matuas had with the city, the rural communities of the Chandals, the Doms, the Bagdis, the Chamars, and many lower caste Muslims had lived in the shadow of the cities of Dhaka and Calcutta for several decades. This proximity to the growing Imperial City, the centre of capitalist commerce and imperial rule that was rapidly transforming the feudal and agrarian fabric of the countryside, can be read in the songs of rural Bengal:

> In that land, in a certain city, the Emperor has a throne.
> Together with the Company, he oversees whatever happens.
> That city is the throne of the Company.
>
> (Ghose 1882, *Bhaber Geet* 13G: 160)

In fact, many of the Kobiyals, or singer-performers, in Calcutta, 'came from the city's lower orders' and often moved between rural and urban spaces, consequently playing an important role in 'the experimentations which transformed the traditional rural folk style…into the distinctly urban popular *kobigan*' (Banerjee 1995: 102). The songs of the many smaller religious sects were performed and disseminated across Bengal by the '*kobis*' who, as the Bengali scholar Iswara Gupta writes, often came from the 'Tanti, Muchi, Shuri, Hadi' castes (Gupta 1955: 110). The urban and the rural space were then not as distant as they are usually imagined to be, nor were all centres of culture and learning concentrated in the city space. Sib Chandra Deb, stalwart of the Young Bengal Movement, hailed from the suburban Konnagar where he established the Konnagar Brahmo Samaj in 1863, and centres of learning flourished outside the city, as in the famous seat of Sanskrit erudition, Bhatpara, near Naihati, birthplace of the master of Bengali prose, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. The progressive spirit of rural Bengal is best vindicated by the fact that the first school for Indian girls was opened, not by the European sahib J. D. Bethune in Calcutta but by Indian intellectuals Kalikrishna Mitra, Peary Charan Sarkar, and others in the district town of Barasat in 1847. The city and the country were connected by culture, education, and religion, but this connection was largely facilitated by the upper castes, and the names that we hear from rural Bengal or the suburbs of Calcutta during the nineteenth century are all upper-caste members of the *bhadralok* community. The term bhadralok did not necessarily mean upper

class since the equation of upper caste and upper class is untenable (Broomfield 2018: 5–12). But all who took advantage of colonial education and formed the bhadralok community belonged to the caste Hindu community. The lower castes and especially the untouchable castes inhabited a distinct world that was deliberately denied access to culture and education as defined by the urban elite.

The only culture that was permitted to the so-called lower castes was that of their *sankirtans*, the *kabiyal* songs, folk theatres like the Bolan, folk dances like the Gambhira, or songs of seasonal festivals like the Tushu. This culture was passed down as oral narratives or as handwritten manuscripts, distant from the world of print familiar to the city in the nineteenth century. Harichand's building of the Matua dharma and his obsessive insistence on education for his community was novel and previously unheard of among the deemed-untouchable castes. This strikingly original thinking may be linked to the very different history of Bengal's Chandals before they entered the mainstream Hindu caste system. Accounts by historians and sociologists of this incorporation perhaps indicate why it would be difficult for a once-self-sufficient community to accept the servility demanded of them by Brahmanical Hinduism. Nirmal Kumar Bose writes that the 'populous and hard-working agricultural caste' of the Namasudras suffered 'from a social stigma whose origin (was) difficult to ascertain' (Bose 1958: 406). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay describes the Namasudra community as living an 'almost amphibious life' (Bandyopadhyay 2004: 154) in boats in areas of Bengal that J. C. Jack, in his *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Bakarganj District, 1900–1908*, calls an area 'covered by forests and laced with lagoons, which in time consolidated into marsh' (Eaton 2004: 219). This is the area that Mahananda Haldar describes in his bio/hagiography of Guruchand in the following words,

> In the land of Orakandi, lagoons and waterways abound, …
> Ferried by boats, and water-filled much of the year round.
>
> (Haldar 1943: 61)

Occupying the districts of Faridpur and Bakargunj, the Chandals of Bengal were late entrants into the hierarchy of the caste system. Habituated to a largely self-sufficient existence, they had earlier been involved in a range of occupations: agriculture, carpentry, and fishing. At the time of the Mughal conquest, 'the centres of Hindu civilization were confined to northern and western Bakarganj', writes Richard Eaton. In fact, the

> northwest was also the only part of Bakarganj where the Hindu popula-tion exceeded Muslims in early British census records, for as Hindu immi-grants pushed into this area, those native groups already inhabiting the region – mainly Chandal fishing tribes – were absorbed into Hindu society as peasant cultivators.
>
> (Eaton 2004: 219)

As the rivers changed their routes from the north-west to the south-east, the population was pushed towards south-eastern Faridpur, causing the population there to increase by 50 per cent (compared to a mere 7 per cent increase in northern Faridpur) between 1881 and 1911. This late incorporation into Hindu society would explain their low social status within the caste system, with the name Chandal being given to them as a generic term for all lower caste people (Bandyopadhyay 2004: 14). The Chandal rejection of the lowly caste position assigned to them led to their attempts to carve out alternative narratives for themselves through heretical sects, usually Vaishnav, that were regarded with contempt by the caste Hindus (Bandyopadhyay 2004: 32–39).

Increased mainstreaming

Both the Muslims and the Namasudras of Bengal appear to have moved at around the same time towards a relative financial 'stability' around the mid-nineteenth century, subsequent to the growth in rice and jute commerce.[2] Despite requiring long and difficult journeys, the growth in trade gradually brought the two communities closer to the city, making them visible to the world of print and power. Association with the city space meant greater exposure to features of modernity, such as education and the printing press, and familiarity with these ushered in a process of conscious, politically defined community formation. Gopalganj, where the Thakur family settled down, was located on an important riverine trade route linking East Bengal jute-exporting areas through Khulna to Calcutta. Guruchand, then a youth of about 20 years, was inspired by the teeming, innumerable boats laden with 'rice, jute, mustard and pulses' (Haldar 1943: 61) that traversed the riverine routes and became a reasonably successful businessman whose work took him to the cities frequently. He built a number of big boats and, having set up shops in local trading centres, he began to import goods from the city of Calcutta. Through his many visits to the city, Guruchand noted that 'the most respected individual in society was the youth who was English-educated' and he 'could not keep himself distant from this English-education movement' (Haldar 1943: 61–65, Thakur 1994: 5, 83). 'In those days, very few people in the villages could gain employment under the English government. One could say that these jobs were the monopoly of the city-dwellers' (Thakur 1994: 4). Yet the single-minded determination of Guruchand's son, Sashi Bhushan, travelling frequently to Faridpur and Calcutta, gained him employment under the East Bengal and Assam government as a sub-registrar in 1907 (ibid.: 22). This was done through the kind support of the Australian Baptist missionary Cecil Silas Mead who arrived in Bengal at the turn of the century. The rapid upward mobility of the core Matua family has been looked at askance by historians like Sumit Sarkar (2019: 169) and by many Matuas now settled in the city or places like Kakdwip, 50 miles away. They also feel that the 'politicization' of the Thakur family has detracted from the original protestant faith that Harichand had created.[3]

This criticism is based on the fact that the sect has seen a not-so-gradual shift towards Hinduization since the decades that saw a growing connection of the Namasudra elite with the urban spaces. The rejection of the Brahmanical hegemony and the caste system that had marked the Matua faith may be seen as severely compromised by the later leaders, such as Sashi Bhushan Thakur and Pramatha Ranjan Thakur, whose activities marked a return to the idolatry of Brahmanical Hinduism and its belief in the Hindu almanac's list of auspicious and inauspicious dates. In fact, the very second sentence of P. R. Thakur's *Atmacharit Ba Purbasmriti* claims Brahman origin:

> I was born on 31st Jaishthya, 1309 Bangabda, which is 15 June, 1902 C. E., on the occasion of the holy Ganga-snan, Dussehra *tithi*, into the famous Thakur dynasty in Orakandi village of Faridpur district, in modern East Bengal. *The Thakur dynasty of Orakandi is of Brahman origin*.
>
> <div align="right">(Thakur 1994: 1, italics mine)</div>

Harichand's teachings, like those of most religious leaders, are available to us, not through his direct words or writings but as passed down by his disciples. Since *Sri Sri Hari Lilamrita*, the first biography/hagiography of Harichand was published in 1916, three decades after Harichand's death and in direct contradiction of his expressly stated desire, it is not unexpected that questions regarding sections of the narrative have been raised (see Mukherjee 2018; T. Sarkar 2010). While some of Harichand's words have been passed down orally, possibly unchanged, through generations and have attained a proverbial status, such as the saying, '*Haate kaam, mukhe naam*' ('Hands at work, the Lord's name on your lips'), accounts of miracles and claims of Maithili Brahman descent have been questioned both within and outside the Matua fold. These questions are aggravated by many differences between the editions of the text itself. One major difference is the addition of this 'originally Maithili Brahman' lineage, absent in the first edition, to the later editions of *Sri Sri Hari Lilamrita*. The urban-educated Sashi Bhushan Thakur had introduced the celebration of Durga Puja into the family home at Orakandi from the year that his son Pramatha Ranjan was born. This practice, however, was stopped by Guruchand after he met Rev. Mead. It was begun by his son Sashi Bhushan again from 1913 (Thakur 1994: 86–87). Manohar Mouli Biswas believes that it was possible for Sashi Bhushan to reintroduce the Durga Puja because Guruchand had, by then, grown aged and infirm.[4] In his biography of Harichand, *Matua Ek Mukti Senar Naam*, Manoranjan Byapari paints a similar picture of puja celebrations all around the despondent and helpless Guruchand:

> The celebrations of Durga Puja had been completed with much pomp and splendour at Orakandi. There was only one man who sat depressed and defeated. That man was Gurucharan Biswas. He had been crushed by the tremendous pressure of his family members. No longer did they feel

necessary to offer his words the kind of obedience as earlier. The times had now given the position of dominance to the educated and high-salary-employed Sashi Bhushan.

(Byapari 2018: 472)

This return to idolatry and Brahmanical Hinduism, for all intents and purposes a process of Sanskritization (Srinivas 1952) has been viewed as a betrayal by many among the Matuas, and Sudhir Ranjan Halder concludes that the worship of Durga, then prevalent among the rich and landed families of Calcutta, was brought into the Thakur family by Sashi Bhushan in order to keep up with his peers in the city (Halder 2017). Halder has also critiqued the Vaishnava and Shakta allusions in the hagiographies of Harichand and Guruchand, calling this attempted blend of the Matua ideals with Brahmanical Hinduism 'two-faced' or hypocritical (*dvicharita*):

> It would not be an exaggeration to term the blend of the Vedic and the un-Vedic that the author has created in the text a betrayal. A number of the imaginary stories that he (the author Tarak Sarkar) has introduced into the narrative in the style of the Vedic texts, are entirely in dissonance with the non-Vedic Matua religion. The sayings of Harichand Thakur, which the author has included in his book, are not in accord with the author's attempt to make Harichand Thakur into an avatar in the Vedic ideal.
>
> (Halder 2017)

Religious or secular?

Harichand founded the Matua faith upon protest against injustice and the ideal of *bhakti*, which encouraged a direct relationship with God. These are elements of the Vaishnava bhakti tradition with which Harichand had been familiar through his Vaishnava father, Yashowanta. Strikingly, however, in his idea of forging a direct relationship with God, Harichand's faith also did away with the *gurubad* (preceptor's teachings) propagated by other religious sects and communities of the times: the Vaishnava *sampradayas* like the Kartabhaja, Sufi sects like the Sahebdhani, other dissenting groups like the Khushi, the Balahadi, the baul, and the fakir that were popular in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Harichand denounced all rituals and servility to human beings. Despite the idolatry, the avatarhood, and other elements that have come to be a part of the Matua faith over two generations since Harichand, the almost-severely spartan dharma propounded by the founder is still recognizable, making its presence felt in spite of the Vaishnava iconography that frames the hagiography *Sri Sri Hari Lilamrita*. One wonders where Harichand drew from, if at all, to shape this faith. Two movements that were roughly contemporary to Harichand's in Bengal, which mirror elements of the Matua faith were, first, the Fara'izi or the Fara'idi movement begun by

Haji Sariatullah and continued by Duddu Miyan in rural Bengal and, second, the reforms in Hinduism taking place in urban Calcutta.

The Fara'izi movement, which began in 1818 in Madaripur, an area that was first part of Bakarganj and then of Faridpur, both Chandal-populated districts, was sweeping through rural Bengal in Harichand's youth. With its objective to 'purify' the lived Islam of rural Bengal and return it to its original form, shorn of the rituals and idolatry that had entered the faith, Haji Shariatullah's movement was in accordance with the 'Islamic revivalist tendency which had become a conspicuous phenomenon in the Muslim world during the nineteenth century A.D' (Khan 1970: 123). Shariatullah's perspective had been inspired by his visit to the city of Calcutta where he met and took classes from Maulana Basharat Ali. In this context, it is interesting to note the role that the city, even in its early days, played in the Fara'izi movement. It would play a similar role, rather differently, in the Matua dharma about a century later, as Sashi Bhushan and his son Pramatha Ranjan Thakur determined the trajectory of the faith. That the urban sphere with its 'superior' scholarship, greater affluence, access to 'progressive' technology, and dominant political power had an impact upon the lived Islam of East Bengal has been studied by many (Ahmed 1981; Murshid 1995). Because of its wider perspective that raised the Fara'izi movement out of its local context, the movement has been

> classified with such other revivalist movements as the Muwahhidun or so-called Wahhabism of Arabia, Salafiyth movement of Egypt, Sannusiyah movement of Libya, Fulani movement of Nigeria, Paduri movement of Indonesia and Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah and Ahl-i-Hadith movements of Indo-Pak subcontinent
>
> (Khan 1970: 123).

Historically, there is no correct or incorrect form of any religion, though theologically such a differentiation may be made. In history, it is the dominant form of a religion that is generally accepted as the 'correct' form, and, buttressed by the power of the urban space with its inter/intra-national perspective, the forms of religion as practised in urban Bengal became dominant. The clearly articulated rejection of idols, both of the divine and the avatars, and an understanding of Hari in the abstract may have had associations with the powerful Fara'izi movement in the vicinity of the Namasudras that became so popular in East Bengal. Some precepts of the Matua dharma may indicate the close relationship of the Namasudra peasants with Muslim peasants, sharing as they did the same geographical terrain. As in Islam, for example, sexual abstinence was neither required to achieve spiritual purity in the Matua dharma nor was it approved of. Celibacy was discouraged, and marriage was treated as an important institution with the ideal of *garhyastha dharma* (householder's faith) as the preferred route to salvation.[5] But the core reason for the widespread appeal of both the Fara'izi movement and the Matua dharma possibly lay in their resistance to the oppression and

exploitation that the poor Muslim and lower-caste peasant faced from the zamindars and the indigo planters, the *nil kuthiyals*. As Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan writes of the Fara'izi movement,

> In their appeal to the masses, they unreservedly condemned all types of oppression (*zulm*) and exploitation of man by man, and put their weight heavily on the side of the struggling masses against the indigenous as well as foreign exploiters.
>
> (Khan 1970: 124)

It is for this reason that the Matua dharma, too, has frequently been called a 'movement' (Biswas 2015; Gupta 2019; Sinha Roy 2016), blending the secular dimensions with the religious, leading to its acceptance by many other castes over time.

This brings us to the second movement contemporary to the spread of the Matua dharma: the reform of Hinduism taking place in urban Calcutta. It is uncertain if the Namasudras had any knowledge of this, given the difficulty of communication and their location in the far-eastern fringes of Bengal. The link between rural and urban Bengal forged by the *kabiyals*, as mentioned earlier, would have been rather tenuous in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nor is there any documented reference by Harichand to the reform movements taking place in Calcutta, though comparisons between Guruchand Biswas's later endeavours to spread English education among his community and Ram Mohan Roy's similar endeavour are detailed in recent scholarship. One crucial difference between the social and religious reforms of nineteenth-century Calcutta and the Matua dharma is that the former had much to do with the secular western concepts of enlightenment or modernity, while the Matua dharma was founded on religious faith. The core of reason and egalitarianism, albeit conflicted (Chakrabarty 2002), of the Bengal Renaissance does not appear to have been present in the Matua dharma. Any exploration of the faith in scholarly terms, therefore, needs to recognize the Matua protest against injustice and oppression as embedded in a religious discourse. Attempting to demonstrate why a critical take on 'the legacies of the Enlightenment' is necessary to historians, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes,

> At stake in this Indian debate is an important question about how and in what terms one may, in writing subaltern histories, see the subaltern classes as political actors. Theoretical conceptions of the political are always secular. But political action by peasants during and after the nationalist movement often involved the agency of gods and spirits. Is this necessarily an undesirable form of political imagination? Should the peasant be educated out of this tendency? The constitution makers of India accepted the need for a separation of religious and political institutions.
>
> (Chakrabarty 2002: 22)

A study of the Matua dharma, however, does not allow for this 'separation'. In exploring this faith born out of rebellion against another powerful religion

that humiliated and oppressed a community, it is perhaps also necessary to recognize the irrelevance of the secular-religious binary in this context. While the Matua narrative is a religious one, drawing its strength not from secular discourses of humanism and egalitarianism but from belief in a God who is All-Merciful, it is also a narrative born out of the worldly pressures of poverty and hardship, and these would have played a significant role in fashioning this faith. The anger and desperation born of difficult situations can hardly be marked as *either* secular *or* religious. In this context, Richard Eaton's theory of the rise of Islam along the Bengal frontier being consequent to a fusion of the secular and the religious may be pertinent since it deals with the same geographical terrain and the same, or similar, people. Attempting to understand Islamicization in East Bengal, Eaton discusses and dismisses the theories of immigration, of the religion of the sword, of patronage, and, finally, of social liberation. This last theory, created by British historians and ethnographers, has found the greatest popular acceptance regarding conversions to Islam. It postulates an oppressive, unchanging Brahmanical society which the oppressed castes break away from in search of the social equality hitherto denied to them. Eaton argues that this theory is flawed because it characterizes the Bengali peasants inhabiting this area as having a clear conception of the ideal of human equality and of being seekers of that social equality in Islam. This 'attributes present-day values to peoples of the past, it reads history backwards'. Eaton argues that the distribution of Muslims along the Bengal frontier indicates an 'outcome precisely opposite to the one predicted by the theory – namely, the less the prior exposure to Brahmanic civilization, the greater the incidence of subsequent Islamization' (Eaton 2004: 117–119). Citing the folk legends of Kalketu and Bonbibi, Eaton argues for charismatic pioneers who cleared the forest and reclaimed the land, enabling communities to settle there. Eaton's findings, in the same terrain as was occupied by the Namasudras, indicate the difficulty of segregating the religious from the secular here since these pioneers of the frontier went on to be revered as *pirs* or Muslim holy men (Eaton 2004: 212–227) by their communities.

Harichand's ethic of work, which he instilled into his community with his words, 'Haate kaam, mukhe naam' is, in fact, an ethic that blends the religious and the secular without privileging either. Similar to Weber's understanding of the Protestant ethic, this saying may be translated as 'hands at work, the Lord's name on your lips'. That work was seen as essential to the Matuas had everything to do with the desperately impoverished state of the community. As P. R. Thakur writes, when Harichand arrived at Orakandi with his community, they were 'in a miserably (*shochoniyo*) poor state'. Work, indeed very hard work, would be necessary to lift the community from this abject state of poverty. Unlike the Protestant ethic in Weber's analysis, however, the Matua faith does not link the ethic of work to an ascetic life for worldly profit. It couples the ethic of work to an ascetic life in quest of dignity. It was dignity that had been denied to Harichand and his brothers in Safalidanga, the village where they had originally lived. Compelled to leave

the village when the court peon arrived with papers and served him a notice based on an unjust case, they lost their property and arrived at Orakandi in a penurious state. The tyranny of papers was therefore a lesson Harichand learnt early in his life. Hugo Blanco writes of this fetish of the paper which places the subaltern in a vulnerable position:

> It is necessary to understand that for centuries the oppressors of the peasants made them regard paper as god. Paper became a fetish: Arrest orders are made of paper. By means of paper they crush the Indian in the courts.… All the reckonings you have made, all your logical arguments, they refute by showing you a paper: the paper supersedes logic, it defeats it.
>
> (Blanco 1972: 84–85)

To counter this tyranny of papers, Harichand's son Guruchand was educated in the Persian language, the language of the courts (Thakur 1994: 82), and education was made one of the commandments of Harichand:

> My father Harichand has thus instructed me
> To bring education to every home of my community.
>
> (Haldar 1943: 105)

The education movement that Guruchand Biswas was to begin among the Namasudras with the missionary Mead, bringing the ideas of modernity and social mobility to this untouchable caste community was, therefore, not entirely a consequence of Guruchand's exposure to urban Calcutta. They were in keeping with the Matua tenets preached by Harichand who had spoken about the need to earn money and about the benefits education would bring to 'a backward community' (Haldar 1943: 101). Guruchand had, in fact, begun a *pathshala* himself at Orakandi in 1880, two-and-a-half decades before he met Mead. Later, with the missionary's support, and through him also the government's, more schools were opened up in Faridpur, and, though the total number remains uncertain, the possibility of education was indeed made a reality for the community. The education of Namasudra girls, though, seems to have been encouraged by the coming of Mead and by Sashi Bhushan's exposure to Calcutta. The Australian missionaries Ms. Tuck and Ms. Thomson were joined by a Bengali Christian woman who came to Orakandi with her husband, and all three of them would go to Namasudra homes to teach the girls. It is uncertain whether Guruchand's daughters were educated, though education was not unknown among women of this generation since Sashi Bhusan's wife could read quite well and sign her name (Thakur 1994: 18). Sashi Bhushan's daughters Pramada Bala and Sukhada Bala received education in a school for girls set up by the Christian missionaries on land near Guruchand's house, and Sukhada Bala went on to study in a missionary school in Dharamtallah, Calcutta. 'Almost every girl from every house in the village,' writes P. R. Thakur, came to study in this school and 'the superstitions born of illiteracy in the hearts of the women faded away with education' (Thakur 1994: 63). Some

sense of equality among men and women, however, appears to have prevailed among the community even before their exposure to urban Bengal, but this may have been necessitated by the harsh living conditions that made the seclusion of women in the inner quarters (*andarmahal*) an absurdity. Access to education made it possible for the community to aspire beyond the destiny handed to them by their inherited socio-political positions.

The salient feature of this new collective identity of the Namasudras was their solidarity as a community, a strength that was gradually lost as the community entered the urban space and, consequently, constitutional politics in the 1930s, a process of disintegration explored in depth by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. The context of the nationalist movement with its discourse of Hindu nationalism influenced the Namasudra leaders, changing the dimensions of the Matua dharma as practised by the Thakur family. This was the community that, led by Guruchand and supported by Rev. Mead, had, during the census agitation of 1911, separated themselves from the Hindus to create a distinct identity in a decisive petition that they submitted to the government:

> We beg to add that, though our religious rites and their observances and social customs are similar to those of high-caste Brahmins, we have not the slightest connection with any of the Hindu communities. We are not allowed to join them in their social and religious ceremonies…we have been smarting under their yoke of bondage.… Thus we desire to be recognized by the Government as entirely a different community having separate claim to political privileges like Muhammadans.[6]

Yet Guruchand's grandson P. R. Thakur reads his ancestors' faith as in keeping with the Vedanta: 'my grandfather was considered to be the avatar of Sri Sri Thakur by his disciples. Sri Sri Thakur did not believe in many gods and goddesses. He was a monotheist. The religion of the Vedanta was his dharma' (Thakur 1994: 119). Perhaps the upper-caste nationalist leaders' willingness 'to touch and be touched by those they considered untouchable' (Sen 2018: 9) 'helped' this Hinduization of the Matua core family. Joya Chatterji finds that the Hindu Mahasabha's rhetoric of *shuddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (consolidation) and the recognition by some Hindu leaders of the need to 'reclaim' the low castes in order to create a unified Hindu political community (Chatterji 2002: 192) resonated with Dalit aspirations for higher status within the caste order. Nor does she find 'much contemporary evidence to suggest that the Scheduled Castes resisted this drive to bundle them into the "Hindu Community"' in the cases she studied (Chatterji 2002: 197).

Conclusion

While the urban settlement of Thakurnagar in North 24-Parganas has remained the epicentre of the dharma, with thousands from all over India and the world gathering there for the Baruni mela, the Matua communities'

dharma evolved in different ways in different places. Some Matua celebrations of Harichand in places other than Thakurnagar have no association with the Thakur family. Two main accusations are levelled against the family by the organizers of these events: one, that the family has now got too 'politicized' and two, that the Matua dharma of Thakurnagar no longer has the anti-Brahmanical spirit of Harichand's original dharma. Both the 'politicization' and the Hinduization may be traced to the early decades of the twentieth century when the numerical strength of the Namasudras began to make a dent in the representative politics of the country, and the Matuas began to be courted by leading political parties. The 'politicization' began with the Namasudra support of the nationalist movement, which was a shift from the stance taken up by Guruchand who had not seen any common cause for his community with the Hindu, upper-caste, landed nationalists. Kapil Krishna Thakur believes that the Matua movement, the Renaissance for 'depressed Bengal', 'paved the way for Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and P.R. Thakur's entry into the constituent assembly' (Sarangi 2018: 2), thus facilitating social mobility. With education, government employment, and proximity to urban space, the sharp lines of division that deterred any crossovers between the urban landed population and the rural Namasudra population eased, and common ground emerged.

The Matua dharma's transformation from a protestant faith, self-defined as distinct from Hinduism, to a conformist one describing itself as a sect of Vaishnava Hinduism, has meant the bundling together of conflicting ideologies. Harichand's teaching that Vedanta doctrines made people fatalistic, encouraging them to accept injustice and exploitation on the grounds that they would either be rewarded in the next life or that this misery was justified by their *karma*, is still popular among the Matuas. But these teachings are undercut by the increased Hinduization of the sect, with Hindu concepts of *karma* and *avatar-bad* becoming popular among the Matuas. The Matua faith was Harichand's endeavour to construct a space of possibility for his community, a space hitherto unforeseen and unimagined, of amplitudes and freedoms that could empower them in the secular, physical world. His concept of the sacred was embodied in the figure of Hari, a divine anchor that enabled them to create themselves anew for the first time in centuries. To make this possible, Harichand and Guruchand had seen the necessity of using processes which would effectively counter the marginalization of the sect and the power of those who sought to suppress them. These processes had required them to draw upon the resources of the city: education, employment, organization, and support from some hegemonic sections of society. The objective of the faith's founders had been to make accessible an alternative discourse that rejected the hierarchy of caste and enabled the Chandals to claim dignity. Subsequently, increasing Hinduization and greater proximity to the city has meant a far larger population and far greater visibility than the faith could have imagined in rural Bengal, but it has also seen 'urban' processes dominate and determine features of the faith. Thus there are now more awkward silences over the legacy and fiercer debates over the past within the Matua community

than ever before. Divisions between its followers have made the Matua population heterogeneous, with different approaches to the dharma that had once tightly knit together a small and vulnerable community.

Notes

1 Interview with Manohar Mouli Biswas at his residence on 3 January 2020.
2 The jute acreage of the Bengal delta increased from about 50,000 acres in the 1850s to close to three million acres in 1900, making these weaker communities more visible and audible than they had been earlier. For a detailed discussion on the transformation of the trade scenario, see Ali (2012).
3 Personal interviews (2019) with city-based Matua followers, including distinguished members of the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sangstha.
4 Interview with Manohar Mouli Biswas at his residence on 3 January 2020.
5 The word '*matam*' used by the Matuas for their dancing and chanting of Haribol, is interesting for its echo of the Shia word as is the '*Dvadash Ajna*' or the Twelve Commandments of the Matua dharma. More research is required to explore the connections between these two faiths.
6 Monthly Report for February 1911, Government of India, Home (Political), April 1911, Progs No. 20, National Archives of India. Quoted in Bandyopadhyay (2004: 84).

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7   On residues and reuse

A festival and its afterlife in an Indian metropolis

Tapati Guha-Thakurta

The favourite goddess of Bengal, Durga, has always had a deep constitutive link with the city of Kolkata. It is a relationship of mutual concordance. If this metropolis has given the Durga Puja (the annual festival surrounding the home-coming of the goddess)[1] its markedly urban and contemporary character, then the expanding contours of the festival have in many ways shaped the specific urbanity of Kolkata's streets and localities. This city is where we can best track the passage of Durga Puja from its extravagant celebrations within the homes of the merchant and land-owning aristocracy in the late eighteenth century to its later twentieth-century life as a '*Sarbojanin Utsab*' (a community 'festival for all') in the open spaces of the city. This burgeoning history of the public community Puja, in turn, offers an important way of mapping the geographical spread of the late colonial and postcolonial city, with its dense spatial graph of older and newer neighbourhoods. This city is also where we most intensely witness the festival's proclivity to constantly outstrip the rites of worship and turn into an occasion for sociability and celebrations, hedonism and revelry, public spectacle, and mass touring (Figure 7.1). Not least of all, Kolkata is where the present-day festival has taken on its grandest public scale, encompassing all spaces, streets, and neighbourhoods; its largest commercial and corporate dimensions; and, most importantly, its rising profile as a public art event. And it is in this contemporary avatar that the Durga Puja seeks to give the city its global cultural 'branding', its key cultural event to showcase to the rest of the country and the world.[2]

Where resides the 'religious'?

It may well be asked, what persists in the present form of the urban festival that can be recuperated as 'religious'? Is it all possible or even analytically useful to separate a liturgical domain of customs and practices from the broader ambience of festivities that have evolved within the same sphere? Across time and culture, celebrations, pageants, and spectacles have histori-cally been an inseparable feature of the public performance of religion. The Durga Puja, in particular, has lent itself most resonantly to the notion of a festival (*utsab*), where the autumn season was always a time of congregation and conviviality and of the close enmeshing of worship with mass public cel-ebration. In recent times, these cultures of festivity in Kolkata have come to cohere more and more around an efflorescence of art and craft productions by

Figure 7.1 Touring crowds at a Puja pavilion designed like a Tibetan Buddhist pagoda.
         Durga Puja of Mudiali Club, Kolkata, 2013

 (photograph by the author)

new cohorts of Puja designers, a blitz of publicity and awards, and an unpar-
alleled intensity of crowd touring and photography. As the biggest show in
town, it has become primarily a spectacle of advertising and consumption, of
fashion and new releases – of products ranging from the older varieties of
literary annuals, music albums, clothes, or jewellery ranges to new electronic
gadgets, cell phone ringtones and caller tunes, computer screen savers or
health and holiday packages. Moreover, as a form of public art exhibition
spread across the entire metropolis, it also lays out for mass viewing a vast
display of architectural and archaeological sites, craft tableaux, tribal art vil-
lages, and new orders of public art installations (Figures 7.2, 7.3).

  There is no other goddess (among the country's growing divine pantheon)
who so openly tests the sanctity of worship within her festival. Yet as I set out
in a recent book to write a 'non-religious' and 'artistic' history of the Durga
Pujas of contemporary Kolkata, I found myself struggling to capture the forms
of affect and sentiment that continue to inflect today's overtly commercial,
consumerist, and exhibitionary event (Guha-Thakurta 2015: 4–7).[3] Neither the
term 'religious' nor its opposing term 'secular' seemed to have any easy fit. If
the disappearing religiosity of the public festival has been a matter of long-
standing lament, the 'secular' has proved to be an equally difficult denomina-
tion to attach to a celebration where Durga remains the central affective
protagonist. The term *Puja* (worship) too has remained an immovable fixture,
referring sometimes to the organizing local club, sometimes to the entire festi-
val, and only in passing to the ritual practices from where it emerged. If the
urban Durga Puja has always been inadequately 'religious', it has also remained
incommensurately 'secular'. It is my contention that the festival has, over a
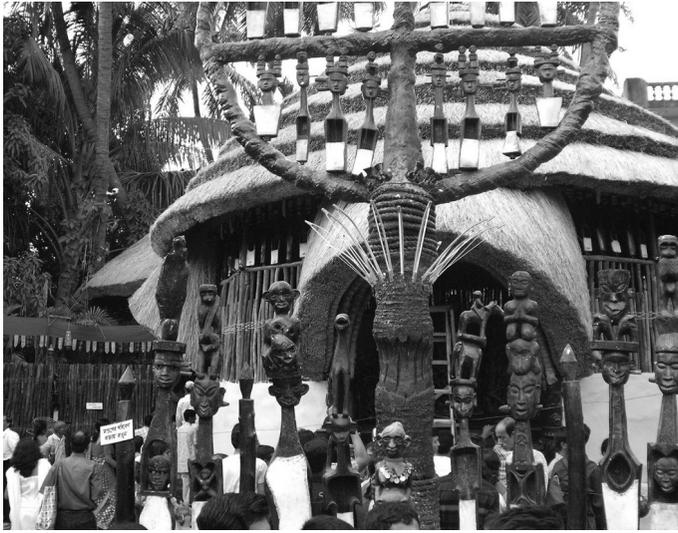
Figure 7.2 A tribal art complex with wooden sculptures, designed by Gopal Poddar at the Durga Puja of Barisha Club, Behala, Kolkata, 2011

(photograph by the author)

Figure 7.3 Entrance pavilion with the buffalo symbolizing Mahishasura and the ten arms of goddess Durga, designed by Bhabatosh Sutar, Durga Puja of Rajdanga Naba Uday Sangha, Kolkata, 2010

(photograph by the author)

long period of its history, opened up a domain of social affect and transaction where the normative, institutional categories of the 'religious' and the 'secular' can neither fall comfortably in place nor be set off in opposition to each other.

Following Giorgio Agamben, it may be pertinent to replace these categories of the 'religious' and the 'secular' with those of the 'sacred' and the 'profane' and to think of their co-constitution in a process that he calls 'profanations', in which the consecrated object of the divine is continually returned to the 'free use and property of men'. The Pujas may be positioned within that every-day liminal zone of use and exchange, where, to quote him, the 'sacred and profane represent the two poles of a system in which a floating signifier travels from one domain to the other without ceasing to refer to the same object', where, in the constant passage of meanings between the two, one must reckon with 'something like a residue of profanity in every consecrated thing and a remnant of sacredness in every profaned object' (Agamben 2007: 73–78).[4] While the work of sacralization, Agamben argues, centres around keeping the spheres of humans and gods separate and distinct, that of profanation is about a refusal to hold on to these separations and to return that which was rendered sacred to the human sphere, through contact, touch, play, use, and abandon-ment. As against the process of secularization, which represses the religious while leaving intact its forces, replicating its orders by simply moving objects and practices from one realm to another, the work of profanation, he argues, 'neutralizes' and 'deactivates' that which it profanes (Agamben 2007: 77).

The pertinence of bringing Agamben's notion of 'profanations' into the context of the Durga Pujas of the past and present comes with the necessary caveat that ideas of the 'sacred' and 'religious' on which he builds the argu-ments about separations and returns remain grounded in a normative western Christian matrix. In what ways, we must ask, is the notion extendable to the very different social and institutional field of 'religion' within the vast 'non-disciplinarian', multi-sectarian milieu of gods, beliefs, and practices that has been given the name Hinduism (Asad 1993: 1–2, 54; Asad 2003: 30–37)?[5] Can there ever be any hard and fast separations of the worlds of the human and the divine in a framework of worship, where the embodied icon always exudes a deep sense of personhood, where the sacrality of deities, in both Brahmanical and popular cults, is inextricably tied to mortal lives and identities? This is all the more so in the case of essentially non-Brahmanical deities like Durga and her family in Bengal, who stand ensconced within a long tradition of intimate humanization and domestication within the medieval tradition of the *Mangalkavyas* and within the paintings, songs, and performances of popular folklore. If in these earlier narratives the goddess's transformation into house-wife and mother involved her induction into the travails of ordinary rural life, then the same genealogy has allowed for her equally compelling incorporation into the changing middle-class desires and lifestyles of modern times, with the same playful mix of humour and irreverence. So, on the heady occasion of the annual descent to earth of the goddess with her entourage of four children, each act by which she is, as Agamben calls it, 'profaned by contagion' (Agamben 2007: 79) becomes a form of creative appropriation and reanima-tion – whereby Durga's affective powers as an icon are neither neutralized nor deactivated but continually recharged in her promiscuous entanglements with the everyday worlds of human consumption.

The ephemeral and the transient

In what follows, the chapter will explore the specific connotations of this notion of 'profanations' within the festival as it hurtles each year from the phase of production to that of destruction, from a cycle of consecration to that of recycling and waste. Its central focus is on the theme of impermanence that is germane to all such seasonal religious festivals, especially the Durga Pujas. With no major Durga temples in existence in Bengal, the worship of the goddess has always been tied to a transitory cycle of her yearly arrival and departure – premised on the fabrication of clay images (*pratimas*) to be immersed in the river at the end of the Pujas, and the creation of elaborately constructed, dismountable pavilions, called *pandals*, on open grounds. The immense time, labour, and creative energy invested in the creation of the goddess's images and earthly abodes stand contrasted by the routine forms of their dispersals. The effect of the 'aesthetic' in this public sphere lies in the briefness of its interventions, in the fleetingness of the marks it leaves on objects, spaces, and the sensorium. Everything must be savoured and absorbed within the short time span of the festival week; the continuum lies in the layering of memories across the seasons and cyclical nature of the event, whereby the end of one year's Puja heralds the awaiting and preparations for the next.[6]

From the frenzies of making that dramatically transform the face of the city over the months building up to the Pujas, the chapter shifts its attention to the many forms of unmaking that leave their equal imprint on the urban landscape. It looks at how the logic of the ephemeral has generated a particular festival economy of waste and recycling that now gets tied to a year-round cycle of festivities, propelling large movements of labour and material within and beyond the city. To what extent can this cycle of destruction be thought of as 'profanations' or the 'deactivation' of the once consecrated? What kinds of remnants of the sacred lie hidden in the post-festival landscape of debris and fragments? How do we engage with the vast residue of objects, skills, and aspirations that the festival disgorges each year to linger within the everyday fabric of the city?

Processes of discarding here involve different economies of return and reuse. In the one case – as with the clay images of the deities – the process is about the physical disintegration of objects that have finite lifespans and easily revert to becoming raw material and refuse. The decaying remains of idols that lie strewn across the city through the year carry signs of the hierarchies between different gods and goddesses and their calendars of worship – separating the figures of subaltern goddesses, such as Manasa or Shitala, which are never immersed in water but left standing under trees or on water banks for their heads and bodies to slowly fall apart (Figure 7.4), from those of major goddesses, such as Durga, Kali, or Jagaddhatri, given grand ceremonial send-offs before they are cast into the river. For Hindus in India, riverbanks are where we mortals too part with the dead, where we surrender to the water the last earthly vestiges of our loved ones. Imbued with the symbolism of the cycle of nature and life, the bodies of

Figure 7.4 Clay idols of goddess Shitala, left by the waterside, on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, Kolkata, 2013

(photograph by the author)

the gods, like human ashes, are returned to the elements, most auspiciously to the river, from whose bed comes the clay to sculpt them anew. Hence, the emphasis on the use of biodegradable material – a straw-stuffed mould layered with alluvial clay – in the making of these images, and on the removal from the immersed deities of all that is non-dissolvable and recyclable, such as the wooden frame, the clothes, weapons, or ornaments from the river waters. Hence, also, the dilemma of today's new genre of 'art' Durgas, made of durable material like fibreglass, wood, or stone that are in search of a continued existence as works of sculpture and cannot be reduced to idol refuse. In the other case – as with the dispersals of the pavilions and their embellishments – the process of falling to waste is multilayered. It involves varying ways in which objects, while remaining whole, outlive the prime function for which they were made or become saleable and usable in other contexts. Afterlives here may entail the reduction of *pandal* architectures to reusable bamboo and plywood parts, their transportation in part and in whole as portable tableaux, and their piecemeal reinstallation in other sites, with their decorative components trickling into the local market for ethnic art and craft wares.

The post-festival destinies of Durga Puja productions then take them into different categories of waste – that which may be called 'ritual garbage' and has been the subject of the cultural archaeology and anthropology of religious practices across the world (see Grimes 2011) or that which comes under the rubric of industrial and consumer junk, around which has grown a large
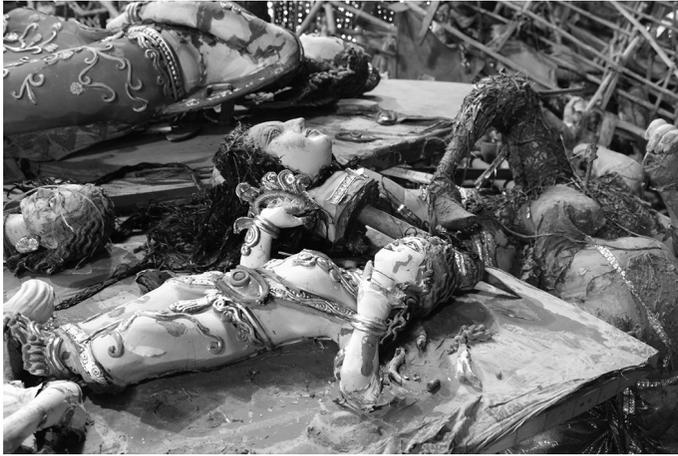
Figure 7.5 Idol corpses and refuse on the water bank, Babughat, Kolkata, 2011
(photograph by Moumita Sen)

repertoire of contemporary art practices and another kind of anthropology of modern trash (see Scanlan 2004; Strasser 1999; and in the context of Kolkata, Chakrabarty 1992; Kaviraj 1997). In recent times, contemporary Indian artists across the local and national spectrums have turned to varieties of urban consumer waste to create bricolage sculptures, mini cityscapes, and even junky fashion wear.[7] Like their peers in the worlds of contemporary art, the city's Puja designers have also made artistic capital out of cheap, throw-away objects and materials – be they earthen teacups, broken records, plastic bottles and toys, or heavier industrial waste. The main difference lies in that these festival creations thereafter frequently forfeit the rights of authorship and themselves return to the state of disposable trash.

As it offers vignettes of the destruction and afterlives of festival productions, the chapter moves between contrasting scenarios – from the speedy laying to waste and the piling of idol garbage on the riverbanks to the careful disman-tling, packaging, and travels of Puja pavilions and installations – from the spill-over of the artwork and design aesthetic of the Pujas into new spaces of collecting and display to fresh spectres of apathy and abandonment. Through these scenarios, it opens out to a year-round urban landscape of festival left-overs – abandoned idol corpses on water banks, stacked-up bamboo poles in parks, still-to-be-removed hoardings of Pujas in street corners, remnants of *pandal* décor and installations on streets and in club rooms, and the occasional preserved Durga image in a museum or a hotel lobby (Figures 7.5 and 7.6).

Figure 7.6 Remnants of a fibreglass giant eye that was part of ***pandal*** décor, Abasar
  Club Durga Puja, Bhowanipur, Kolkata, 2010

(photograph by the author)

From worshipped image to idol refuse

As the festival enters its last day, *Bijoya Dashami*, the goddess and her entou-
rage are the first to leave. The greatest fanfare surrounds the rituals of her
departure and her final journey to the riverbank. The day is centrally associ-
ated with the practices of *bisarjan* and *bhasan* – the first term filled with the
solemnity of renunciation that is associated with the act of immersion of the
deity, the second colloquial term carrying the more vivid invocation of the act
of floating in water (Figures 7.7, 7.8). The epitomic image of the occasion
remains that of the goddess's upturned face and clenched fists gently bobbing
above water, surrounded by fragments of her ornaments and weapons. What
allows for this sharp volte-face of the worshipped idol from a living entity to
discarded matter? At which point of time, after the end of the *Dashami* rituals,
is life believed to leave the sculpted body of the deities, rendering them into
inanimate objects to be abandoned or immersed? Is it when the priest chants
his last incantations, often even shaking the background frame, allowing the
gods to depart from the temporary bodies they had occupied for a few days?
Or is it following the beautiful *darpan* ritual still observed in all traditional
household Pujas where a mirror is placed at the foot of Durga and a pot of
Ganga water poured over her reflected image in a symbolic immersion?

  The affective engagement with the living goddess lingers and deepens,
through the intimate moments of the *sindur-khela*, when married women col-
lectively bid farewell to 'Ma' with *sindur*, *pan*, and *sandesh* (Figure 7.9). And
it reaches its pitch during the boisterous beats of the *dhak* and *dhunuchi
naach*, when the images, their faces doused with red, mouths stuffed with

Figure 7.7 Women praying to the goddess on the riverbank before the immersion of her image, Champatala Ghat, Kolkata, 2013

(photograph by Sanjeet Chowdhury)

Figure 7.8 Immersing the goddess in the river, Champatala Ghat, Kolkata, 2017

(photograph by Sanjeet Chowdhury)

sweets, and their decorations coming undone, are carried out of the altars and placed on illuminated trucks to make their round of the neighbourhood before they head for the river banks. The pathos of this last day is infectious. As the evening proceeds, the eyes of the deity seem to brim with tears, and a quiet melancholy sinks in with her leaving. Paradoxically, it is in this last phase of the most intense humanization of the goddess that our attachment

Figure 7.9 Bidding farewell to the goddess and her family on Bijoya Dashami at a household Puja in south Kolkata, 2009

(photograph by Sanjeet Chowdhury)

with her must finally be severed. That is best achieved in the crowded, raucous, and impersonal milieu of the *ghat* when the new managerial regime of immersions takes over, and the goddess is given over to the idol-bearers and civic workers to be seen through to the end. It is here, on these main riverbanks of Kolkata designated for immersions, that earlier practices of consigning the goddess to the river are now contending with new environmental narratives on saving the Hooghly and the city's water bodies from the pollution of idol waste (see Datta 2011; *HT* 2013). And it is on these banks that one witnesses a new brutality of the destruction of the deity that rudely overhauls the traditional poetics of immersion.

From 2011, the Kolkata Port Trust began to deploy two giant cranes and barges at the central idol-immersion site within the city, at the Baje Kadamtala Ghat adjoining Babughat and Judges Ghat, on the main stretch of the city's riverfront along the Strand, which are stated to witness as many as 1,500 immersions over two to three nights following *Bijoya Dashami*, often one every five minutes during the peak hours of the evening. As the largest Durga ensembles arrive here, these enormous images are offloaded from the trucks, stripped of the flowers and other accessories on their bodies that are to be deposited in vast garbage vats, and circled around in their wooden frames a few times by the immersion *ghat* coolies to hoarse cries of victory to the goddess and invocation of her return the next year before they are lowered onto the muddy banks and pushed to the edge of the waters. The images are given a token submersion in the river, but they are no longer allowed to float away into the deep. Contained within a roped enclosure, the job of the cranes is to immediately scoop up and dump these idol corpses on the barges on the embankment (Basu 2012; *TOI* 2011). As flaying limbs and torsos drop from above, and detached heads pop out of the mangled bodies of straw and clay, all feelings are numbed by the intensity of labour and exhaustion. Within minutes of moving into the water, the goddess's destruction is complete, and her

remains are thrown into a mass of disintegrated idol parts that are heaped on the water banks at all immersion sites (see Figure 7.5).

Older forms of immersion, of course, continue, as do the older practices of retrieval and recycling. Across most of the smaller embankments (*ghats*) and ponds within and beyond the city, household and community idols continue to be floated in water and are left to slowly disintegrate. But even here, what follows is an immediate rifling of the floating images by groups of urchins and ragpickers who scramble waist and neck-deep into the waters to retrieve portions of wooden frames, tinsel crowns, and weapons; stretches of cloth; and, the most prized item of all, the face clay moulds of goddesses, all of which can be sold for small prices at Kolkata's main idol-making hub, Kumartuli (Ghosh Dastidar 2010). While wooden structures and straw stuffing are best retrieved later from the dried idol refuse that is heaped on the banks, pulling out the intact faces of the deities from the water requires a different swiftness and cunning. This is a job that has been mastered over the years by destitute boys who live by scavenging the river and riverbanks, who make their biggest haul during these days of idol immersions (Dhar, 2013a, 2013b). Among the stock photographs of the scenes of immersion are images of these children wading to the banks carrying idol heads and headdresses.

These informal recycling practices are now increasingly regulated and contained within an organized municipal drive of clearing the river of immersion refuse. The Calcutta High Court order of 2000 stating that civic agencies be employed for removing idol refuse from the Hooghly within 24 hours of *bhasan*, and the West Bengal Pollution Control Board's statutory guidelines for immersion, framed in 2001, began to take effect only towards the end of the decade. In 2009, the West Bengal government for the first time allocated Rs 6,00,000 to 127 municipalities in the state for this massive undertaking, with the Kolkata and Howrah municipalities getting 50,000 and 30,000 each. This small monetary incentive served to mobilize a larger civic initiative involving paid workers, non-governmental organizations, and Puja club volunteers. By 2013, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation had at their service 500 paid contract labourers who began cleaning the river of idol refuse at 17 *ghats* of the city from dawn after every night of immersion. Stopping immersion in the river has never been an option. Suggestions that some of the larger images of deities be dissolved on-site using jet sprays of water, in what is termed a wash-melt procedure (as is done with some of the large Kali images in suburban towns of Naihati and Bhatpara), has been met with outrage and opposition. The strictures on using lead-free paint on the idols or on scraping all paint off their bodies prior to casting them into the water have also proved difficult to implement. Instead, what has come into place more effectively over the past few years is a close monitoring and streamlining of immersions and idol clearance across different riverbanks and water bodies throughout the city (see *ABP* 2010, 2013). While the massive cranes in operation at Baje Kadamtala Ghat have offered one kind of speedy if horrific solution to river pollution, the opening of new water bodies for immersion in 2013 (one of which, off the Lake Town-VIP Road, has been specially named 'Debighat') is

intended to divide the city's Pujas into different immersion zones and divert the burden of idol waste from the main Hooghly River. In keeping with other aspects of the festival, an 'environment-friendly' system of immersion and river clearance has emerged as a new area of urban governance – a special initiative of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board, along with the mayors-in-council of the municipal corporation, and a self-professed area of success for Mamata Banerjee's government.[8]

The sale and travel of pandals

None of this kind of institutional coordination is at hand for the clearing of the city's equally vast output of spectacular pavilions. The processes of dispersal here are more mundane and emptied of public attention. They also unfold in piecemeal phases, engaging a network of Puja organizers, *pandal* decorators, designers, and artists, with the occasional entry of government or corporate bodies to acquire a few samples of festival art. Over the past decades, *pandals* have been turned into ambitious varieties of art and craft installations, without any parallel infrastructure emerging for their preservation or reuse and without any systematic planning by clubs, designers, or civic authorities about the future of these productions. Their disassembling occurs through as complex a mobilization of labour and material as went into their making (Figure 7.10) – as they travel from one festival site to another, from Kolkata into different district towns for their Kali or Jagaddhatri Pujas that follow within a month of the Durga Pujas. Or, alternatively, as they move from streets into storage in artist's studios, decorator's workshops, club backyards, private

Figure 7.10 Labourers dismantling a remake of a Chattisgarh village complex at Hindusthan Park, Kolkata, 2008

(photograph by the author)

homes, and lawns, or an odd boutique or public ground tucked away in a corner of the city. With no strict demarcation of their ritual lives, the afterlives of these structures are premised on these loose spills and spreads, on their propensity to disaggregate and reappear in different times and spaces.

The lingering of *pandal* structures on street sites in the days after Durga Puja is partly enabled by the ritual calendar itself. In all community Pujas, the main platform on which Durga was worshipped must be retained to conduct the Lakshmi Puja on the same premises on the full-moon night that follows four days after *Bijoya Dashami*. With the larger surrounding gateways and displays often dismantled to clear the street, the central core of the *pandal* outfit is retained for this low-key, subdued event, the post-festival pall evident around the small forlorn figures of Lakshmi standing alone in these empty public sites.[9] In many cases, the full pavilions with all their décor are left standing by the clubs until the performance of Lakshmi Puja, awaiting buyers or waiting to be dismantled and transported in an already contracted sale to a suburban Puja committee. During 2012–2013, in some of the parks in Salt Lake, the Durga Puja pavilions were retained to house the Kali Puja, marking a new economy of reuse and a coming together in these neighbourhoods of the Durga Puja and Kali Puja committees that were once socially segregated. The fate of the majority of today's 'theme' Puja pavilions, however, is to be shunted from the metropolitan ambience of Kolkata's Durga Pujas to the suburban milieu of Kali Pujas and Jagaddhatri Pujas, where they are freely shorn down, readapted to new spaces, and placed around sizes and styles of locally made images with which they have no aesthetic concordance. Like the pavilions, the idea of a 'theme' Puja travels indiscriminately and in fragments, as a transplantable form emptied of authorship and original conception.

If these sales of *pandal* art underscore the status of the city's Durga Pujas as the master event, as the region's trendsetter in tastes and aesthetics, they also point to the different cultural economies that govern Bengal's larger provincial landscape of Pujas. They outline a distinct festival geography and its hierarchies of Pujas across the state. In this map, different towns are marked by the primacy of different Pujas that come in the wake of the Durga Pujas, each of which have taken on the template of the metropolitan festivals: in its *pandal* 'themes', awards, competitions, and publicity.[10] So, for instance, Kali Pujas are the biggest attractions in a trail of towns from Tamluk at the southern tip of Bengal, through Barasat and Madhyamgram on the outskirts of Kolkata, to Naihati or Durgapur in central Bengal, and Siliguri in the north and the sale destination for many of Kolkata's big Durga Puja *pandals*.

The thickest and most lucrative outflow of Kolkata's productions is to the celebrated Jagaddhatri Puja of the old French colonial town of Chandannagar on the upper banks of the Hooghly, where the scale and grandeur of this festival, held exactly a month after Durga Puja, is integral to the identity of its township. This local pride resonated in my interview with an elderly, now deceased resident man of letters, Kamalacharan Mukhopadhyay, who shared his article on the festival, published in a little magazine he edited, with me (see Mukhopadhyay 2006a, 2006b). If we were to think of how all the raw material, labour, and organization of the *pandal*-making trade comes from the suburban

hinterland into the city, the travels of these built structures back into the sub-
urbs opens up a reciprocity of flows. The Jagaddhatri Puja organizers of
Chandannagar talk of other exchanges too – the light decorations that are the
proud monopoly of this town, with new designs produced every season, move
the following year to Kolkata's Durga Pujas, also to Kali Pujas in other towns,
in exchange for a carry-over of Kolkata's 'theme' pavilions. There is neither
time nor money for these suburban Puja committees to commission fresh work
from Kolkata's prized designers in the few weeks between Durga and the Kali
and Jagaddhatri Pujas. Buying Kolkata's readymade art pavilions becomes the
easier and more affordable option and enhances the scope for awards. Given
that the public or judges hardly overlap in these different festival towns, there is
little chance of anyone noticing these duplications. Therefore, the practice con-
tinues unabated of members of these district Puja committees descending on
Kolkata's Durga Pujas, searching out *pandals*, from *Mahalaya* right up to
Lakshmi Puja, to purchase, package, and take away.

With ownership of *pandals* passing in most cases to the Puja committees that
paid for them or the professional decorators who constructed them, they are the
ones who actively broker these transfers. For the clubs, a pressing concern is a
quick, one-time clearance of these structures from their premises and immedi-
ate cash that can be used to clear off dues or be channelled back into their funds
pool. The decorators, on the other hand, are adept at handling multiple *pandal*
sales and their transportation out of Kolkata – often distributing sections of
structures to different district Pujas, occasionally managing a second recycling
of pavilions from a Kali Puja to a Jagaddhatri Puja or a Kartick Puja that fol-
lows in late November. Most frequently sidelined in all this are the artists who
designed these pavilions, who surrender not only their authorship over their
works but also any share in the sales or say in the manner of reuse. In this recy-
cling economy, only a few designers have over time begun to exercise new kinds
of rights on their productions and their reinstallation. Among them are design-
ers like Prashanta Pal and Gouranga Kuinla, who bring in their own material
and workforce, retain full ownership over their Durga Puja productions, and
organize their packing, transportation, and setting up in other town festivals
through fresh commissions they acquire from these Puja clubs (Figure 7.11).
For Kuinla, to have been able to recycle his Durga Puja productions in Kolkata
between a Kali Puja in his district home town in Tamluk and one or two
Jagaddhatri Pujas in Chandannagar is to have recovered the full cost of his
original production with a generous margin of profit. A field tour of the
Jagaddhatri Pujas of Chandannagar in November 2010 showed up a large num-
ber of transported remakes of his Kolkata Puja productions, with his work
team in charge of each reinstallation and the designer present at the festival
venues, in conversation with judges and sponsors.

Side by side with such travels of entire tableaux, the dismantling of *pandals*
leaves in their wake large bodies of homeless art objects – terracotta statuary,
engraved clay tiles, Madhubani, Pithora or Gond paintings, embroidered
patachitra panels, African masks, and totem poles, painted wooden puppets, or
Bastar metal sculptures. Thrown up by the period's booming crop of craft and
folk-art complexes, these objects seek out new kinds of ethnic tastes within the

Figure 7.11 Gouranga Kuinla's team packing cardboard folding puppets of Durga Puja pavilion for transportation to a suburban Kali Puja, Lake Town Adhibasibrinda Puja, 2010

(photograph by the author)

city. Gathering in *pandal* grounds, club rooms, and artist's studios, these are given away at bargain prices to a mixed clientele of individual collectors, hoteliers, boutique owners, or theme park and film set units. During the 2000s, it became common for Puja clubs to talk of holding auctions to clear off these accumulations of decorative objects and *pandal* décor, sometimes even full installations (see Basu 2017). The term 'auction' serves as a euphemism for quick disposal of this material to whoever is ready to take away a large bulk for a down payment, but it also signals a bid for alternative classes of consumers and other markets outside the district festival circuit. Connoisseurs and collectors are, however, notoriously hard to come by. All the investment of media and corporate sponsors in the event seems to begin and end with the festival. And few Puja artists and organizers have either the right network of contacts or the resources to find a prominent home for their productions in hotels and office grounds or open-air galleries. Whereas the older practices of idol and *pandal* making have the logic of destruction and recycling of materials built into the nature of these trades, the new genres of Durga Puja 'art' struggle to come to terms with their ephemeral public lives and their post-festival redundancy as preservable artworks.

An 'art' that eludes preservation

The problem, I would argue, lies in the very dispensations of 'art' as it has come to rest within this festival field of production, display, and spectatorship. In profiling the contemporary Durga Pujas as Kolkata's biggest public art event, one of the main aims of my book (Guha-Thakurta 2015) was to lay open the claims of 'art' in this festival as both a set of insistent projections

and a mesh of incomplete formations. I looked at the way the importance of holding on to this identity of 'artist' in this creative domain escalates precisely in proportion to the difficulties of doing so. Even as the festival has nurtured a thriving new vocation of art and design, the designation of 'artist' or 'designer', and the authority and acclaim that they generate, is never a secure index in this domain. All transitions in this sphere remain incomplete. Thus, each Puja production, however ambitious, is left with no other name in local parlance but a *pandal* to be dismantled – in the same way that each designer Durga image, however innovative its iconography, is left grappling to transcend its status as an idol and become a 'work of art'. The term *thakur* (deity) is one that continually queers the grounds on which the religious festival contends with its life as a spectacular exhibitionary event. So, for instance, the experience of touring the city-wide display of Puja pavilions is still routinely termed *thakur dekha* ('seeing the gods'), even as this practice of spectatorship has little that is devotional about it, and nothing that equates it with other expanding circuits of pilgrimage tourism.

Let us also consider how a converted warehouse gallery, tucked away deep within the grounds of the city's rejuvenated Dhakuria Lakes (now called Rabindra Sarovar), into which came a selection of artworks from Puja *pandals* and 'art' Durgas of the seasons of 2012 and 2013, came to be referred to by the locals of the area (with wonder and bemusement) as *thakur-der* gallery ('gallery of the gods'; Guha-Thakurta 2012). This appellation said it all – it spoke to the curious status of these images as not-quite worshipped idols and not-quite modern art (Figure 7.12). It also drove home the ambivalence of such a venture of turning goddesses into art objects, of transferring them from a festival venue with its established spectatorship into an isolated gallery venue with no defined public nor any professional team of curators and designers to conceive of a new framework for their viewing. The award-winning renown and 'art' status of these objects within the festival was clearly no guarantee of their new life as works of sculpture in a gallery that was initially set up for contemporary art. Compounding this problem was the complete lack of prior planning, professional expertise, and the involvement of the art community in the forming, in 2012, of what may be seen as the city's first museum of collectible Durga Puja 'art'. Most telling was the callous exclusion of the Puja artists themselves in deciding how and where their Durga images were to be displayed.

It was no surprise, therefore, that this '*thakur-der* gallery' proved to be a still-born venture, sliding into obscurity even as it came into being in November 2012. Neither the high-sounding English title of this exhibition, 'The Masters Collection', nor its Bengali television serial-style title, '*Ma Phirey Elo*' ('The Mother Has Returned') gave it much public mileage. Few in the city's art circuits know or have cared to know about its existence and future, and even fewer have ever visited it. Even as they were collected, a cloud of uncertainty and unresolved questions hung over these exhibits. When the gallery is given over to new exhibitions of the next season's festival art, what will happen to these objects, most of which have nowhere to return to? What will be the cycle of disposals and new acquisitions if this scheme of a year-round space of display of select samples of festival art is to be implemented? How feasible in the long run is the

Figure 7.12 Goddesses on display at the Warehouse Gallery, Rabindra Sarovar, Kolkata, November 2012

(photograph by the author)

idea of such a permanent museum, given how little from each season's festival can be collected and the limited time for which it can be preserved?

By 2014, with no maintenance and no visitors, the museum lay in shambles, its open-air displays broken and lying in disarray. There is no escape, it seems, from the falling to waste of festival objects, even in a location where they were assembled for preservation. These gallery grounds came to be reduced to the same landscape of festival leftovers that one encounters throughout the city – its scattered fragments of assembled Puja 'art' sharing the same fate as two headless, naked idol corpses of a Krishna and Radha that stood outside the complex of the Lakes. Ephemerality remains the quintessence of the phenomenon that swivels around the give and take between spectacle and ruin, between the 'interchangeable and (the) specific, profit and waste, sacred and profane, the whole and the fragment' (Chattopadhyay 2012: 241).

In ending this chapter, let me return to the theme of 'profanations' to ask whether the notions of desacralization in this sphere belong less to the disused religious object and more to the abandoned artefacts that carry the fledgling ambitions of being artworks. That which was worshipped has its natural returns to vegetation and waste. Durga's mortal passage each year from a vast repertoire of beautifully modelled and animated images to heaps of idol refuse does nothing to deactivate her divinity and the emotional verve of her adoration. Rather, what stand 'profaned' are the forsaken goddesses in the gallery which have well outlived their value, both religious and artistic, and have nowhere to go. There is a different niggling sense of violation in the falling to ruin and the inability to be preserved of pavilions and tableaux that are made as works of public art in which are invested as large a dose of artistic aspiration as money, material, and labour.

Each season, I have imagined futures for Durga Puja pavilions that were never to be. Artist Bhabatosh Sutar's spectacular rotunda pavilion with the ten arms of the goddess enclosing a buffalo head from the season of 2010 could have found a new life as public art in the open grounds of New Town Rajarhat (see Figure 7.3). The Pakistani truck-art installation at the Hatibagan Nabin Pally Puja of 2013, which came out of a novel Indo-Pakistan cultural cooperation scheme of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, brought in three Pakistani painters to work on-site, and involved a huge budget, could have been picked up by an enterprising hotelier and converted into a setting for a *dhaba*-style eating outlet as part of the city's booming new restaurant culture (Figure 7.13). Or the pavilion designed with vast book spines with a boutique bookstore interior at the Samaj Sebi Puja on Lake Road the same year could well have been the architectural model for a novel bookstore in the city. My wishes, like those of the artists, keep growing wings, even if they seldom take off.

Yet there is no denying that there are different ways in which the ideas, skills, and materials thrown up by the Durga Pujas are being continually put to new use in the city – especially by a state government and a chief minister who is
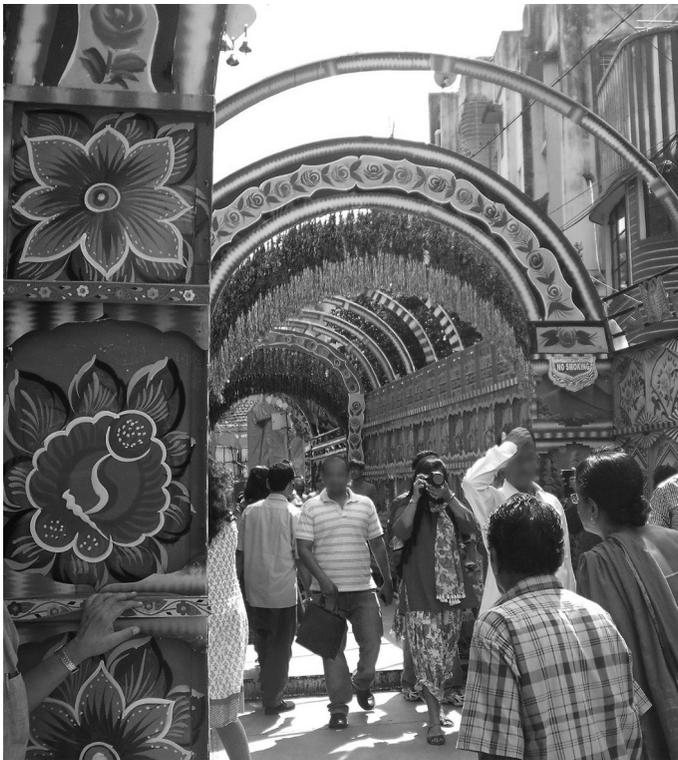
Figure 7.13 : Pavilion and walkway designed with Pakistani truck art on enamel boards, Hatibagan Nabin Pally Durga Puja, Kolkata, 2013

(photograph by the author)

Figure 7.14 : Howrah Bridge replica and Durga Puja immersion tableau at the lake-
side at Baishnabghata Patuli, 2017

(photograph by Debasish Bhaduri)

besotted with her own schemes for 'beautification' of the city. The motifs and materials of the Durga Puja continue to thickly envelop the public spaces in ways that both confound and amuse. Who would have would have thought the goddess' three-pronged spear (the *trishul* with which she pierces the demon *Mahishasura*) would give its form to rows of present-day street lighting? Or that 12 tonnes of scrap iron that the artist Sushanta Pal had used for one of his experimental installations at the Naktala Udayan Sangha Puja would be sold by the club to a local municipal councillor who would use it for a mini replica of Howrah Bridge, constructed across a now beautified water body at Baishnabghata Patuli (see *TT* 2017)? As an unsuspected reincarnation of a Durga Puja pavilion, this miniature bridge also finds itself flanked by a sculpted immersion tableau of the goddess being carried to the river (Figure 7.14). Even if the works of Puja artists seldom find the forms of post-festival collecting and preservation that they seek, there is today a different flow of the remains of their work into popular public art. There is clearly no dearth of demand for the trades of sculpting and pavilion-making in a city where the succession of festivals felicitating the human and the divine never stops. Notwithstanding the ephemerality of the annual event, Durga Puja's material entanglements with the lived fabric of this metropolis remain con-stant and lingering, with the festival never really letting go of its claims on the spaces of the city. And barely does the long layover of one year's Durga Puja recede when we see the traces and residues giving way to a new material topog-raphy of publicities, constructions, and preparations for the next year's Puja.

Notes

1 In Bengal, the martial Durga, in her role of killing the buffalo demon Mahishasura, as invoked in the *Devi Mahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana*, is curiously coupled with her identity as Uma or Parvati, daughter of the presiding deities of the

Himalayas, and consort of lord Shiva. Over a long history, the goddess in Bengal also developed a unique iconography in which she appears killing Mahishasura while flanked by her four divine children, her sons Ganesh and Kartick and her daughters Lakshmi and Saraswati. Every autumn, in an emotional ritual of 'homecoming', Bengalis welcome the goddess both as beloved mother and daughter, who descends to earth with her four children from her mountain abode and returns there after five days of worship.

2 This cultural branding of the city and its mega-festival of Durga has recently been given a new fillip through a Government of India application for the nomination of Kolkata's Durga Puja in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for 2021.

3 This chapter is largely derived from the last chapter of my book.

4 Agamben takes his position among those theorists of religion and secularism who have called into question Emile Durkheim's classic formulation of the institution of religion in terms of the strict separation of the sphere of the 'sacred' from that of the 'profane' and interrogated the extent to which the practices of 'religion' can be easily set apart from the newly secularized practices of art, culture, education, or politics in modernity.

5 While Asad is concerned primarily with the problems of asymmetry in applying the modern Christian concept of religion to Islamic traditions, he hints at the even greater untranslatability of the concept to 'non-disciplinarian, voluntaristic, localized cults of non-centralized religions such as Hinduism' (Asad 1993: 1–2, 54; also see Asad 2003: 30–37 for an important gloss on Agamben's notions of the 'sacred' and the 'profane').

6 This sense is vociferously conveyed in the standard collective cry, '*Ashchhey bochhor abar hobey*' ('It will happen again next year') that rends the air during the farewell rituals and last journey of the goddess to the waterfront.

7 At one end of the national and international spectrum are two Vivan Sundaram exhibitions, *Trash*, 2008–2009, which recreated full city spaces with urban waste, moving from these studio structures to video and digital installations, and *Gagawaka* (2011–2012), which used medical waste to create *haute couture* fashions and had models walk the ramp in this wacky junk-wear. At another end is the example of the exhibition *Waste Side Story* (2013) by local artist Debanjan Roy, who worked on drawings, prints, sculptures, costumes, and full-room installations with varieties of consumer discards and has plans of creating site-specific displays at garbage dumps in the city, involving families of ragpickers who live around these dumps.

8 From 2010 to 2011, the main credit for these moves was taken by Debashis Kumar, mayor-in-council (Squares and Parks), along with Debabrata Majumdar, mayor-in-council (Solid Waste Management) at the KMC. Significant interventions have also come from the state Environment Department head, the river scientist Kalyan Rudra, and the inveterate environmental lobbyist of the city, Subhas Datta, who has repeatedly moved the Green Tribunal on the noise pollution, river pollution, and damage to greenery caused by the Pujas.

9 Despite the requirement of the worship of a small Lakshmi image at every Durga Puja altar, the public event is generally lacklustre, except in some bazaars and commercial establishments where this goddess of wealth and fortune is lavishly feted. By and large, Lakshmi Puja remains a home event in Bengal. Traditionally performed every Thursday by women reading the *Lakshmi-panchali* before a *Lakshmi-sara*, the annual autumnal Lakshmi Puja is held on a different scale in households.

10 This regional cultural geography of festivals across the different district towns of West Bengal, and their connected economies of production, recirculation, and sponsorships, requires a separate study. Situating the metropolitan event of Kolkata's Durga Puja within this broader regional festival economy would open up a critical new dimension to the kind of study I have undertaken here.

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8 The leftover untouch

Sensing caste in the modern urban lives of a devotional instrument

Sukanya Sarbadhikary

Urbanity, sacrality, caste, and the senses

The city breathes religion with all its senses: our task is to track the rhythms of this breath and the operations of these senses even when they appear abstracted in an urban context. The focus of this chapter is on two sacred urban senses, sound and touch, and on their associated sensibilities. In the particular devotional context where I conduct my examination, the whole body becomes an agent of sacrality, with ears, hands, eyes, fingers, and skin, devoted entirely to the making and playing of a musical instrument: the *khol*. The *khol* literally means a casing, and I wish to analyze the tactile crafting and sonic rhythming of the instrument as congruous skillful processes, grafting the human body's sensitive form onto the vessel's sounding.

Bengal's religious soundscape has been haunted by the *khol* since at least the medieval period. This conical clay drum, with its rims and straps made of cowhide, has a distinctive sonic identity: the player's left side has a deep, bass, hollow sound, and the right one, a sharp, loud resonance. It is the chief accompaniment of *kirtan*, a devotional sung genre of immense significance through medieval and modern times in rural and urban Bengal. Although the *khol* resembles the South Indian classical instrument, *mrdangam*, it has a distinctive identity in Bengal, where it was associated with the formation of devotional collectivities, both because of its use in *kirtans* describing the erotic dalliances of the divine couple Radha and Krishna and for its addictive sonic rhythms, generating an urgent sense of corporeal connection among listeners. The sound of the *khol*, travelling great distances across intervening space, draws not only proximate auditors but also all whose ears are touched by this sacred call into the fold of a collectivity. The *khol* has also had long-standing esoteric associations, each of its discrete tonalities being compared with spiritually cultivated breath interiors of the body (see Sarbadhikary 2015: 205–213). Since the modern period, the *khol* has been used in recorded performances of other devotional musical genres, such as Baul melodies and Tagore's religious songs.

My focus is on the *khol's* urban contemporary life, through an examination of the relationship between a famous player (GB) and a maker (SD): the former's family has been procuring the instrument from the latter's for several

generations.[1] Both live in the southern part of the city of Kolkata. They have together redefined the meaning of the instrument and its sacrality through various idioms of urbanity, such as skill, vocation, livelihood, innovation, individuality, inter-instrumental soundscapes, and classicism. In different ways, these idioms 'secularize' the instrument and the human relations it involves. Many of these idioms would be unimaginable in the traditional devotional musical context and are invoked in terms of a modern, urban work ethic. These new forms generate a range of stereotypical yet complex distinctions between rural-urban, folk-classical, religious-secular, *desi-margi*, and traditional guru-pupil training as against individual or innovative skill cultivation.

There is another subtle distinction, however, which complicates matters: traditional resignation to caste and modern, sometimes unself-conscious perpetuation of caste. Secular remainders of caste pose new affective challenges to theorization. Although the *khol* and *kirtan*, since the times of the saint Chaitanya in the sixteenth century, were associated with reaching out across caste and religious boundaries, only the lowest and 'untouchable' castes were generationally involved in making the instrument. While the *khol's* very complex rhythm structures always involved long, specialized processes of training, classicism, urbanization, and their associated idioms led to 'distancing' of the instrument from its (earlier) context of production, a distance that was translated into further caste gaps. Caste distances in the urban context operate more subtly but also intensely. Differential skills and expertise maintain caste interdependence, but the division between the artisan and the artist is also sustained, if not deepened.

But this caste differentiation, a Brahmanical ideology that sustains differential embodied attitudes, need not involve strict caste belongings on all sides. So, while instrument makers are always untouchables or of the lowest castes, players could belong to any caste group. The instrumentalist in our case, for instance, is a non-Brahman. He identified his family as belonging to a middle caste while mentioning that a few Assamese lineages of their extended caste group have also claimed reserved status (that is, as members of historically deprived castes). Starkly evident, however, is that players can never be makers of *khol*, working with earthenware or leather. I argue that the urban space increases the logic of Brahmanical distance between the contexts of production and consumption. Extreme skill is embedded in the skin – the bodily envelope – of both maker and player of this devotional instrument, but the instrumentalist will never touch or smell the ingredients, or know the body – the ears, hands, even feet, of the person who makes the sound he lives by and claims to *produce*. But the maker's hands need to anticipate with his mind's ear, every sonic detail that makes the *khol* suitable for performance.

The tactile auditory aesthetics in this case involves a subtle mind-body continuum involving the head-ears-hands-eyes-feet: the skill of intuiting sound connect the maker and player on the same cognitive thread of concentration, which is able to cultivate instrumental sound despite the clatter of

street noise (the maker's shop is located in one of the busiest corners of a thoroughfare) or the rehearsed cacophony of fusion music (the player is part of an urban club of classical percussionists). Their sensory mind-bodies have been trained for decades by traditional learned gurus, while both have also adjusted to urban circumstances by learning, respectively, to make other instruments or perform on them. While their own fathers and uncles (the professions are significantly gendered) would make or play only the *khol*, impelled both by their religious dispositions and specialized technical training, they have started innovating by 'mixing' the *khol* with other instruments. Another shift from the instrument's religious associations to ostensibly musicological or secular value has been in terms of its subordination to the *tabla*, as narratives of both the maker and player prove. The *tabla*, as opposed to the *khol*, has always been a part of the secular musical tradition. A subtler point here is that the *tabla* is known to be a more tuneful instrument, while the *khol* projects an unequivocally sombre rhythm, its mathematical pace constituting its esoteric value for the breath beats of the sonic religious meditator. Both maker and player, in this case, innovate by 'tuning' the *khol*, thus secularizing it as a *tabla*-like percussion instrument. Notably, though, the South Indian percussion, *mrdangam*, which bears striking physical resemblance with the *khol*, has a tuneful sound life comparable to the *tabla*. As T. M. Krishna explains, it has been used as an accompaniment of Carnatic classical music since the last century, adjusting itself to the needs of individual specialization, secular market demands, stage presence, and 'muscular musicality' of talented musicians (2020: 143).

However, in the *khol's* context, I interpret the 'post' secular as that which stays on after secularism and resists the secular. It is a *remainder*. I shall make this argument through detailed sensory analyses. Despite their complex forms of sensory equality and secularizing tendencies, there remain two kinds of urban post-seculars in *khol* music: nostalgia over the erstwhile religious life of the art/instrument and the stark domains of caste, where, notwithstanding the equalizing phenomenology of sound, the sensory topologies of smell and untouch remain distinct. I shall use the vernacular sensory register of *ucchishta* (leavings of food, or the person touching them) and *a-sparśa* (untouch), to theorize these afterlives of caste. Caste is leftover not only in practice but also in a sense of resignation among untouchable workers about their locations in caste-as-body, and a more complex nostalgia about the loss of caste-as-skill. Also, despite the mind-body continuum of both maker and player, the latter asserts that his mind dictates his hands, while the maker is indistinguishable from his smelling, touching, but untouched body.

These complex overlaps of the body, musicology, religiosity, and the post-secular are generated particularly by the contemporary urban context. Here, new aesthetics have replaced forms of piety, but – as this case study of the relationship between an expert maker and player will reveal – also generate new kinds of mindfulness and corporeality that reap earlier understandings of sacrality. While I discuss everyday religion, materiality, caste, performance, and sensory lives in the urban context, an entire rural and semi-urban

network of *khol* lives continue to be tied to devotional metaphysics and remain distinct.

The urban *khol's* sonic, tactile, and untouchable lives are situated within broader contexts of the history and philosophy of senses. Much scholarship argues that hearing was subordinated to vision in the modern perceptual map, its sonorous, immersive envelope viewed as self-effacing, uncritical, and antithetical to Enlightenment values. The 'masculine spectatorial consciousness' and reason were founded on the 'withering away of the "spiritual sense"' (Hirschkind 2006: 13–14). While Walter Benjamin lamented the loss of the art of listening and storytelling, Kant was especially suspicious of listening since it was anti-modern (ibid.: 26, 13). Veit Erlmann also charts the historical inferiority of hearing vis-à-vis sight in the regime of the senses as pre- or even anti-modern. However, the ears find other kinds of ways of inhabiting the modern, marking a haunting 'return of the repressed' (Erlmann 2004: 5).

Charles Hirschkind's influential ethnography demonstrates how sound and aurality make 'counter-historical' claims on the contemporary: aural media constitute a prime ideological mover of the human sensorium and critical politics in the Islamic revival movements of the Middle East. Hirschkind uses a series of significant terms, such as 'substrate of sensory knowledges', 'acoustic architecture', 'infrastructural affects and sensibilities', and 'ethically responsive sensorium' (2006: 2–9) to argue that sound, listening, and ethics constitute an affective parameter within which listening bodies inhabit and establish their modernity in urban Cairo. Although this religious ear is distinctly 'in tune with the instruments of modernity' (ibid.: 9), it renders modern categories, especially democracy, inadequate. Thus, Hirschkind alerts us to the 'complex and often contradictory relations to the norms and regulatory institutions of the modern nation-state', which everyday embodied practices may have (2006: 5). These non-contemporaries within the contemporaneous (ibid.: 19) may indeed also be the post-secular vestiges. Influenced by Hirschkind's understanding of aural aesthetics as a deeply affective visceral conditioning that engages with modernity through both fit and excess, I show how urban subjects embody secular and post-secular ethics in their complicated sensory lives of sound and (un)touch.

While modernity subordinated hearing to sight, taste, smell, and touch were relegated as even lower senses with animalistic properties of unreflective excess (Hirschkind 2006: 15). Sight and sound were seen as possessing different kinds of cognitive qualities, for instance, the ability to reproduce them in memory, while the other senses were inferior in being almost indistinguishable from visceral instincts. In this hierarchical sequence, sound, however, has particular resonances with touch. Like touch, it is able to dissolve the subject-object boundary: it follows what Merleau-Ponty understands as 'reversibility' (see Carman 2008: 123). Thus sound, even rhythmic percussion, is felt as both seeping in from outside and rising from within.[2] As Steven Connor persuasively says, sounds have a tactile relation, an 'umbilical continuity' with their source. This osmotic sonic tactility produces both 'fear and fascination' (see Erlmann 2004: 9). Erlmann adds,

> Instead of the presumed rationality of…technologies…founded on the belief that the isolation and manipulation of each individual sense somehow naturally corresponds to the social compartmentalization in individual capitalism, there are seemingly unruly intersections between the sense of hearing and a motley array of skin textures, body fluids, and body organs.
>
> (Ibid.)

In the Indian context, Jaaware (2019), more recently, has shown that the simple divide between touching and not touching also evades consciousness, grounds perception, and mediates between the literal, metaphorical, and metaphysical. He further forwards a new understanding of an 'agonistic intimacy' based on touch, the peculiar ethics of caste (ibid.: viii).

I argue that the dangerous proximity of sound and touch requires an auditory experience to construct a sensory order of untouch, to deal with the affective anxiety of immediacy, and to stake its claim to the modern. Thus, the touch of sound (on the hands and ears of the player and listener) has to be differentiated from the touch of the originary constituents of sound: clay and leather. Yet these materials are indispensable for their sonic life. Used in the production of sound and sonic tactility, they are then abandoned in the form of a leftover untouchable body. By this double strategy, the processed matter as drum is touched, and the smell and touch of the body which works with the unprocessed matter is considered as continuous with the defiling viscera and thus made untouchable. Sonic touch can be modern only insofar as it creates an opposite, untouch, in order to sanitize itself. Thus, while the materials contribute to the sanitized modern sound/touch, the body using this material to make the sound, the maker, is left untouchable. I, therefore, analyze the relationship between the maker and player of the devotional instrument as a distinct urban formation in which aesthetics and relationalities are made modern, yet also subtly in excess of modernity.

This 'leftover', I argue, is the post-secular, 'insecurely poised between the modern and the "primitive", between the rational and the affective, the discursive and the embodied' (Erlmann 2004: 13). The leftover affect is proximate to the sense of abjection described by Kristeva, which 'leads me toward and separates me from' the improper, unclean, filth, waste, dung, sewage, and muck (Kristeva 1982: 2). Caste may thus be seen as the 'mana' of urban life, to use William Mazzarella's rendition of the concept, which is a '"primitive" potentiality' of the affective rush of energy we call sacred, 'that at once is and is not the same as parallel potentialities in "modern" societies' (Mazzarella 2017: 10). This *extimate* mana, placed between the intimate and external, everyday and exceptional, is a 'mimetic archive' that sustains and perpetuates the residue of the primitive in the 'concrete history of the senses, and in the habits of our shared environment' (ibid.: 8).

The life and touch of the sound player

The *khol* is renowned as the chief accompaniment of the devotional sung genre of *kirtan*. Its players, adept in the knowledge of the rhythms and

religious aesthetics of the form, suspend the instrument from their shoulders and typically surrender to the complex cadences, lyrics, and patterns of intricate tempo, dancing and jumping with the escalating moods and beats. The *khol's* sounds reach afar to engender intense senses of devotional community among all who are touched by it. As Graves says, it has always had a sacrality with an 'affecting presence' and been treated as a full embodied existence rather than a thing (Graves 2009: 105).

I have grown up listening to the *khol*, but the first time I heard GB playing it, the absolute distinctness of his technique was strongly clear. He played for me sitting in his room, rather than standing, and adjusted his *khol's* sound to an electronic tuner. This was a novel method since all *khol* players I know have told me that unlike other percussion instruments, the *khol* is divine, literally the embodiment of Radha-Krishna's sacred erotics, and thus does not need any artificial tuning: its pitch suits any scale (Sarbadhikary 2015: 207). However, GB's *khol* sounded very full, loud, crafty, forceful, and completely addictive, with great reverberation between the rims, and a subtle echo audible even within proximity. Moreover, GB uttered specific *khol* rhythms (*bols*) in syllabic form, which he then played on the instrument, with absolute similitude between his oral utterance and the sounds produced by his hands. Thus every part of the *khol* acquired a breathing life such that it spoke through his hands, exactly like his mouth; his mouth, hands, and the 'voice' of the instrument became seamless surrogates. There was clarity and confidence in every utterance, gesture, and movement.

GB has single-handedly transformed the *khol* from a rural, folk form of devotional percussion to a classical instrument now claiming a unique place in stage repertoires. The distinctness of his instrument and playing techniques are equally informed by the expert strategies of SD's craftsmanship and their relation of dependence, exclusivity, and urban combination. GB completely relies on him (and his family) for procuring his instruments. Their making and playing are perfectly attuned to redefining and secularizing the *khol* through urban idioms. This urban classicism, secularism, and the individual originality of GB's *khol* as an essentially musical rather than devotional instrument is brought about through a number of critical shifts: its becoming a solo percussion instrument rather than *kirtan's* accompaniment; its tuning with external electronic aids; its increased need for global travel, producing flexibility in the raw constituent material rather than the exclusive use of 'sacred', but brittle, clay; its gaining importance as a stage, not simply devotional, instrument, with the player's posture no longer upright and agile but sitting and concentrated; and, most significantly, its subordination to the percussion paradigm of the *tabla*, which also alters its sound, rhythms, and *bols*. Thus, the stereotypical image of Chaitanya ecstatically dancing with his followers to the sound of the *khol* is being replaced by urbane stage conditions where sophisticated instrumentalists are experimenting with its sounds for an international audience.

GB, like traditional players, pays respect to the instrument as *sri khol* (Skt. 'śrī': 'endowed with grace'). But while others respect the *khol's* divine ontology, GB respects its inherent musicality. GB is now in his

early 50s. His family was from Faridpur, in East Bengal. His father, uncle, and grandfather all learned the *khol* and had strong religious dispositions with which they related to the instrument. However, GB recalled his father saying that his *khol* guru was an excellent performer: many would travel long distances simply to hear his *khol* in addition to the *kirtan*. GB's father also believed that people had a special affinity for the sound of his *khol*, *independently* of the devotional *kirtan* mood. This led GB to imagine a solo identity for the instrument. After the Partition of India, they moved to Kolkata, and at the age of 10, he started lessons with his father's guru. In the city, they realized that the *khol* would not fetch as much respect since it was considered a mere accompaniment to *kirtan*, and thus he also started to learn *tabla*, already a significant classical percussion instrument, with his brother. His brother is now a renowned *tabla* player. It was GB's tremendous sense of individuality, and ambition, that gave the *khol* a unique life. This uniqueness, based on the fact that none had heard the solo form of *khol*, was framed within the paradigms set by the secular instrument, *tabla*.

GB explained that the two percussion instruments have different acoustic natures, with the *khol* defter at specifying rhythmic intricacies and the *tabla* more tuneful in its sound. These specificities depend on the particular ways of their crafting. The *tabla's* surfaces have three parts: the farthest end (*kani*) has a separate piece of tightened, slightly suppressed leather attached to it; its sound is sharp and requires hard fingering; the middle black portion (*gab*) also has a suppressed sound, and the area in-between these (literally called *sur*, melody) has the most variable sonic surface, is able to produce the maximum tune, and subjected to variable styles of wrist movement and finger combinations. Thus, the *tabla* is an attractive accompaniment to classical vocal music and a significant solo instrument since its tonal variability makes rhythm most vibrant. Its tuning depends on the stretchability of the leather and the tension it can produce. But the skin on the *khol*'s right side is so tightly stretched that it produces a very sharp sound, incapable of further musical scaling. Since it is made of clay, musicians cannot even use the hammer to even its rims and tweak the sounds, as in the case of the *tabla* (or *mrdangam*). GB does however instruct SD to make his *khol's* edges amenable to slight tuning. Traditionally, the *khol*, precisely because of this shrillness, is regarded as a most tuneful instrument since its mesmeric beat and shrill echoes travel great distances and haunt the rural landscape. The *khol* spoke passionately to all, while the *tabla's* tunefulness appealed to a learned, proximate audience. Thus, GB has replaced the religious-sonic sensibility of the *khol* with a strictly musicological one, and in the process, its religious/universal community has been replaced by a musical/specialist public.

The *khol* has a smaller surface mouth (on the right side) compared to the *tabla*, and GB feels this is a 'structural limitation' to the variations the palms can rhythmically produce. So, he innovates upon traditional playing techniques and uses the nails, etc., to produce distinct tones. In his words,

> I have to make up for the *khol's* lack. It is harder to perform with a body without organs. I make up for this disability by adopting the *tabla's* methods, so that people return saying what they heard, and not what they could not hear.

This 'lack', 'disability', and 'organlessness' of a religious audition is compensated for by alternative sonic techniques of exclusively musical dispositions.

In GB's experiential narrative, the *khol* rhythms are more difficult and intense since they require concentrated use of all fingers, including the thumb, which is not necessary with the *tabla*. But learning the *tabla* gives greater 'flexibility' to the mind and hands; its structures are more 'methodical', in his view, and thus he uses it as his chief reference in 'experimenting' with the *khol*. He said, 'The *khol* always had the potential for independence, rather than being only an accompaniment in religious music. The *tabla* set it free'. Secularizing the instrument thus gives it the 'freedom' for modern functioning. GB is currently one of the highest regarded stage percussion instrumentalists, accompanying not devotional *kirtan* singers but other famous classical percussionists and 'adjusting' *khol* rhythms to ones played by *tabla* experts.

Clay is traditionally used to make *khols* both because it is considered sacred and its porosity and roughness add to the sonic texture, but GB finds it risky to carry clay drums on long international tours. Although he is aware that earth gives the 'sweetest' sound to the instrument, and changing its material would change its entire lifeworld, he has asked SD to construct a wooden *khol* for travelling purposes. Thus, instead of the travelling sound of the *khol*, GB's cosmopolitan aesthetics gives a travelling life to the instrument. However, after 43 years of stage performances, he still feels that it is people's embodied memory of *khol's* distinctness as a religious instrument, and its peculiar sound, that surprises through its newness. In a sense, this nostalgia for the *khol's* total embodied sacred aura, which urbanity has now lost and cannot afford, facilitates a modern secular appropriation.

GB summarizes his achievement by saying, 'I had a concept of sound in mind, which I was able to execute. Successive generations may now continue in that tradition of innovation'. Unlike traditional *khol* players, GB does not talk about submerging himself in sounds but rather controlling them. Also, although he is completely dependent for the 'execution of his concept', on the expertise and skill of SD's lineage, and discusses every minute dimension of sound that he imagines, with him, the 'conceptual legacy' still considers the craftsmanship to be an aid to that imagination. This is similar to Krishna's description of the intense dependence of *mrdangam* stalwarts like Mani Iyer on their maker counterparts, such as Sevittian, which, nevertheless, existed alongside explicit caste separation. Although Iyer was completely reliant on the maker for the instrument's elusive perfect tone (*nadam*), the construction process was considered dirty and always essentially lower than playing the instrument, and the maker even consumed Iyer's leftover food following orthodox caste prescriptions (Krishna 2020: 18, 19, 26, 31).

Krishna is however emphatic about the intellectual, aesthetic, and physically strenuous work that the *mrdangam* maker embodies but which is regrettably forgotten. Similarly, SD's sonic craftsmanship, I argue, not only helps but informs and constitutes the 'concept' of sound. Despite GB's admission that his most specific requirements and detailings of sonic imagination and stage pragmatics are understood and performed by SD, in his narrative strategy, there is the unselfconscious sense that it is the concept which propels action, the mind-ear of the player that instructs the hand-ear of the maker. Yet the minutest details of shapes, sizes, tightness of leather, flexibility, surface areas, rims, etc., completely determine the specific instrumental identities and the sounds, rhythms, and syllables produced. These material sounds can then frame conceptual clarity. Thus, the maker's hands, fingers, ears, mind, and feet are intrinsically tied to the hands, ears, mind, and voice of the player. In the most symbolic way, as we shall see, the mind and feet are connected, essentially relating caste orders and manual-conceptual worlds, in the same sonic creativity. For both members of this sonic universe, 'the entire sensorimotor apparatus, with its mnemonic layers of kinesthetic and visceral experience…form the auditory membrane' (Hirschkind 2006: 27).

The life and touch of the sound maker

SD, aged around 60, works with his brother in an old shop on a by-lane of one of the busiest streets of South Kolkata. The shop, which belonged to his father, is open from Monday to Saturday. SD works for 12 hours daily, including Sunday, if necessary. SD is a well-known maker, and customers flock from every part of the region to procure the best instruments. His family, originally from a village in Birbhum, were expert *khol* makers since before his grandfather's times. He reminisced how they were all strict devotees of Radha-Krishna, treated the *khol* as the saint's devotional body, and made it with utmost dedication, wearing dhotis and sacred *tulsi* necklaces. On principle, they did not make other instruments, even if they were able to since that would involve mixing religious and non-religious vocational purposes. SD said, however,

> This devotion, for me, has transferred to my work. As we moved to the city during my father's time, I realized that I wanted to make other instruments as well, to test my hereditary skill of refining the hands with different constructions. I do retain a special respect for the *khol*, but not a religious temperament.

SD's hands have indeed inherited the precision and grace of generations of sedimented expertise such that, rhythm, tune, and sonic excellence are produced through complex workings of the intuitive hand-ear combinations. He explained that a 'pair of good hands always identify another', and that is why GB relies on SD. He further said that in cities, due to more education, artists' choices are more refined, and their demand for perfectly crafted *khols* more stringent. So, it is more challenging to work for urban buyers, with classicized tastes and proper sonic conceptualization.

He added, 'I have learnt the *khol* and got the *sur* (melody) from my father. Other percussions I learnt from my uncle'. This was a peculiar phrasing since in Bengali, 'learnt the *khol* or *sur*' means playing instruments or singing, while he of course meant making them. However, the phrasing was evocative precisely because the minds-hands-ears making and playing the instrument are connected through an intuitive thread of sound. But this thread, as we shall see, suddenly tears, and the connectivity hides a fissure of intense caste difference.

I have observed the very painstaking process of working on the *khol*, sitting on many occasions in SD's shop.[3] Each stage of the work depends on thorough hereditary knowledge and skilled cognitive practice. During long hours of utterly concentrated work, we would spend extended periods not talking, only working/watching in silence. This silent wait and labour was never boring but rather addictive since its rhythms and repetition involve producing the finest, paper-like, soft, flexible, and supple material out of rawhide, and this process generates a visual/tactile aura of comfort, and when finally grafted onto the clay surface and able to produce sound, that transformation of hand-touch to music is literally wonderful.

The clay mould and cut cowhide reach SD as a very dry, big roll. He knows exactly which portions may be cut in what ways and for what purposes. The cow's stomach skin is most expandable and thus excluded since it cannot produce quality sound. For the *khol's* right side, which produces the sharp, clarified sound, skin is taken from the shoulder region since it is the least stretchable and tight; for the bigger mouth on the left side, which produces a heavier, hollower sound, calfskin is chosen since it is soft like cow skin, but not as thick, making it feel flaccid, not tight. Every slice of skin has a hairy side and a fleshy one. The latter is more uneven and dirty, so the hairy side is flayed since the final sonic tuning ultimately depends on the most even distribution of the surface. So it is scraped with ash throughout; smashed clay moistly clotted with a glue made of rice paste is then put in the middle of the dried skin; after cutting to size, the skin is loosely fitted on the edges of the clay mould; finally, 32 thinly cut slices of skin (*chhot*) are vertically tied to a strong horizontal circular fitting (*pagri*), also made of leather, which holds together the instrument's edges with the straps.

Each of these processes is most complex. The skin's rough edges are meticulously scraped with a knife, cleaned, soaked in water, dried, pencil marks made according to specific measurements, cut in perfect circles fit to the circumferences of the *khol's* edges, and then spirally cut, emptying the centre and producing long strips as *chhots*. The skin is so well-processed that it looks like and has the manoeuvrability of paper, while it is much softer, swifter, smoother, and lenient to the touch. While these processes are more or less similar among *khol* makers, there is a dimension unique to SD. This is the urban classicist ideology of focusing on the drum's *sur* (tune), much like GB. For both, this melody is as important as the instrument's rhythmic capacity, to make it fit for stage performances, especially classical percussion medleys, rather than for only playing them in temples among unlearned devotional audiences. In any case, he argued,

kirtan's popularity in the city has almost disappeared, and with it the need for *khol*. Its use in popular religious music has also diminished and been replaced with technologized instrumental mixing. Its survival, through a reinvented appropriation, has been ensured in classical music. Interestingly, therefore, urbanity and classicism safeguard certain religious survivals, although secularizing them. So, SD obsessively referred to the need to literally fine-tune the *khol*. This is what he has inherited especially from his lineage, he stressed, and what distinguishes him from traditional makers. GB also alerted me to this ability of SD, and both of them have mastered it to produce instruments of urban classicized value. Like GB, SD explained that he learned this fine-tuning through the making of *tablas*. However, this dimension is particularly critical in *khols* since they cannot be tuned later by players.

Thus, each of the *khol's* 32 strings have to be attached to the body with equal tension, since otherwise the tune would be uneven. This perfect equivalence is extremely trying and involves the skillful balancing of hands and feet: the feet are used to push the *khol*, and the hands are simultaneously used to pull the strings. This hands-feet rhythm, like weaving sonic threads, has to be uniformly synchronous. The slightest wavering disturbs the tuning. Krishna evocatively says about a similar force-counterforce stage in *mrdangam* making, that, 'The *mrdangam* had begun its time-keeping', which would continue seamlessly from the manual process to its performative rhythmic life (2020: 168–169). Even more, this tuning is crucially dependent on tactile knowledge: every rawhide has a section which is more expansive than others. This needs to be estimated with the hands by pulling minutely throughout, then marked with a pencil, scraped extra, and during the string-pulling, tautened a little more than other parts to ensure even scaling throughout.

So, the entire work process requires powerful concentration and immaculate coordination of the mind, hands, eyes, and feet. While intense street noise is the constant ambient background to the work, one particular occasion was most telling. In addition to the regular traffic noise, there was a huge political procession which continued for over 20 minutes, with loud sloganeering on the microphone. But not for a minute did SD or his brother even look up, continuing the work with perfect equanimity. Their disposition to the work is compelling: it is marked neither by irritation or boredom, nor overt enjoyment. The seamless repetition is careful, in both senses of cognitive alertness and loving attention. In fact, this most sensitive job is performed with what SD proudly calls *andaj* (intuition). This has become a reflexive concept for him, and he used it on different days to narrate disparate processes. He said, eyes-ears-hands are equally important, but intuition, most critical. Intuition, a balance between cognitive intelligence and embodied practice, ensures repetitive and unfailing labour in tough urban contexts.

The precise materiality of the labouring process in making a *khol* thus anticipates and constitutes its instrumentality. The player is conditioned by the maker, and their respective hand-ears enliven the instrument. Their 'skilled' touches in that sense are equivalent and secularize the *khol* through idioms of sonic perfectibility, innovation, and excellent classicism. But there

are also concealed sensory orderings of hierarchy. Smell and untouch are those literal remains, post-secular leftovers. The constant background in the shop is the stench of rawhide, which was viscerally apparent every time I entered, but temporally inhabited and embodied, as I spent time with them. It becomes an unreflective part of the sound makers lived everyday, and for the sound players and listeners, an inalienable part of the maker's body.

Caste was not easy to discuss with SD. In fact, in the beginning, he was uncomfortable sharing details about the making since it involved discussing raw skin, I realized. Our growing understanding somewhat resolved that discomfort. SD's craftsman self and narrative strategy have two distinct aspects that lead to complicated caste reactions: pride in the inheritance of dexterity, with lament over the loss of caste technique over generations, and sad shame about the lowly status of leatherwork. The first is marked by relative verbosity and the latter met with silence and hopelessness.

The dimension of secular expertise *associates* him with GB, while that of indignity *dissociates*. He explained that both good making and playing, in *khol*, are extremely difficult processes and need sincere training with gurus. Like GB, he has received exclusive training for over ten years, followed every instruction of his father, broke many *khols* before he could make one, and after 25 years, still fusses that his tuning is not as perfect as his guru's. He lamented that his craft's perfection is decreasing over generations; the technical difficulty, and the loss of the instrument's sacred aura, has caused the expertise to disappear, and his son does not even know how to make it. He said, 'I know in my bones how this work is done. But after me, this entire knowledge of the hands will be gone!' Here, caste-as-skill is an ideal to be reached and lamented in loss. This nostalgia approximates what Benjamin calls 'tradition', which 'was found in the slow rhythms associated with artisanal labor' but is now lost, as is the storyteller's 'coordination of the soul, the eye, and the hand' (see Hirschkind 2006: 26). While Gopal Guru thinks of the music of the drum as an 'ontology of melancholy', its stretched skin vibrating with echoes of the worker's strained painful endurance of a lowly living (2018: 312), SD clearly submerges his body-self in the passions of idyllic sound creation and is deeply affected by its imminent disappearance.

Just as GB talked about long hours of practice, SD said they worked on individual *khols* for 14 hours together, even overnight. In fact, their contact time with the instrument, from the moment of its conception to life, is more than the player's. Indeed, this incessant contact ironically creates common casteist ideologies of touch and untouch between the maker and player. One of the earliest imaginations of the origin of percussion is found in the Indian classical treatise on aesthetics, *Natyaśastra*, where a potent flow from natural sound to concept, material, and embodiment is narrated through a sage who hears the sonic variations of rainwater on leaves, returns to his ashram, and reproduces the sounds with varieties of material and raw skin (Bandyopadhyay 1995: 161). Here, intuitive/sensory concept precedes manual labour. However, while SD said, 'Techniques keep rehearsing in my head all the time, even when I am resting', he thought of this work as

primarily, ontologically manual, not conceptual. He never analyzed the logic of construction, but only gave me concrete details, not because the logic is unknown to him, or he is steeped in material concreteness, but rather, as he said, 'These matters are in the work itself, they are completely a part of our *andaj* (intuition). This is not mathematics that I shall explain to you. What's the point? You will never make one'. SD's knowledge is not of mindless detail but carefully minded crafting, keeping texture, sound, and experience in consideration. Yet, while GB categorically mentioned the 'concept' and 'mathematics' of rhythm preceding his manual performance, for SD, concept is subsumed under intuition, which, as an embodied concept, is between the mind and body, concept and percept (see Carman 2008: 18; Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

> Fashioned outside explicit awareness, in the interval between subject and object worlds, such linkages occur in the encounter between what Bergson refers to as virtual memory – residues of past actions installed in the motor mechanisms of the body – and a sensory surround.
>
> (Bergson [1896] 1990, Ch. 3, cited in Hirschkind 2006: 29)

Thus, although they share the urban classicist, secular understanding of *khol*, very subtly, GB and SD remain dissociated as conceptual and manual labourers of aesthetics, and the mirror between theory and experience remains 'cracked' (see Guru and Sarukkai 2012).

However, although my blunt question one day about whether they felt caste disparagement despite recognition for skill was met with a stunned pause, SD also gave his gut response:

> Of course we are considered low. Till the work lasts there is respect. Then that respected instrument is taken, we are simply left behind. We work with leather; none will relate to us. GB will never teach his son how to make a *khol*. No one tells us these in the city, but it is my *andaj*.

So, the same intuition which teaches SD how to make the object also sensitizes him to his own abjection. In both instances, caste is grafted onto his body, as on the object he constructs. I asked, 'Then do you talk about these issues?' Invoking the same phrase of fatalist lament, he said, 'What's the point? These things shall never change'.

However, there *is* a significant way in which others relate to SD (and his caste). It is through untouch. Since the sound, as well as the object that he produces, touches and is touched, to sanitize it, the smell of raw skin; the visuals and knowledge of cow skin being cut, shaped, and processed; and the touch of the producer need avoidance. A religious instrument is secularized, while simultaneously, through avoidable touch, the person is kept untouchable. Refined urban sensibilities cultivate classicism, while raw sensory bodies of fine touch and strong smell are leftover or abjected.

Ucchishta aspar*śa*

The post-secular is thus being understood here as that which is left behind, left despite, or left after the secular urban. This embodied untouchable after-life is affective both because it relates to very delicate subterranean sensory forces that may often elude conscious urban awareness and because SD and others poignantly argue that this body cannot be redeemed, is inhabited without being authored, and there is no point 'talking' about it. I shall try to go beyond spoken explanations and use a vernacular category, *ucchishta*, to understand the sensate experience of subalternity. This unique term has not yet been used to conceptualize caste affect.

The specific problematic in our context of urban aesthetics is that the player/listener depends on the touch of an untouchable (*aspriśya*). As Guru and Sarukkai argue, Indian untouchability is not like Derrida's understanding of it as unattainability but rather refers to a specific objectifiable category of persons of non-touch (2012: 181–182). This is apparently dissolved in a most peculiar manner: the fruit of labour is extricated from the labourer in the form of the product of aesthetics, which is touched through skin and sound, while the producer's body is considered inextricable from the material of production (leather) and discarded through untouch (*asparśa*). In Marxist parlance, the relation of the instrument maker to the instrument is of abstraction and alienation (Guru 2018: 302). However, as Guru powerfully asserts, for the touchable, the object (rawhide) and subject (leather worker) are inalienable and equal 'objects of repulsion' and moral menace (ibid.: 298). In some sense, dead skin has even greater moral value than the worker's live skin, aesthetics then taking precedence over ethics (ibid.: 299, 313).

This is thus not about never touching the process but somewhat like chewing something to extract its juice and then spitting out the remainder. The producer's touch is transmitted through processed leather to the instrument's texture and sound, to the player's hands and listener's ears, and yet, in its indistinguishability from foul-smelling raw leather, it is left behind or abandoned. So, since untouch-touch is a continuum, there is always an urban anxiety, even if not fully conscious. The 'defiling' stinking trace of leather lingers in all aesthetic consumptions of the instrument, and 'untouch' is thus maintained as the supplement of sonic tactility (see also Guru and Sarukkai 2012: 222).

The producer's body-as-such is thus *ucchishta*. Monier-Williams defines this term as food remainder/leftover but also the unwashed body/hands, tainted by the touch of impurity and rendering the toucher impure (Monier-Williams 1899: 173–174, Sen 1971: 78). While terms such as *avaśishta* or *pariśishta* also mean leftover, *ucchishta* (*ut+śishta*) carries the extra connotation of being essentially dirty and ontologically affecting the body stained by it; it has a forceful excess (*ut*) alongside simple remaining (*śishta*). In this case, I am substituting the metaphor of taste for touch. Interestingly, *ucchishta* also refers to what is left after a sacrifice (Monier-Williams 1899: 173–174); while another term for untouchable is *amedhya*, an impure person disallowed

from performing a sacrifice (ibid.: 83). The paradox is that the final remainder of a sacrifice (*vibhuti*) is otherwise considered fundamentally sacred, but here, the purest is considered defiling, and instead of being revered, it is discarded. *Ucchishta* is also defined as the remnant of sensory extraction (*anubhutavaśishta*; Das 1988: 296). In this case, the person's labour is consumed and body rejected. The instrument is the juice, the sound, nourishment, and the making body is leftover.

Anjan Ghosh (2001) reports a particularly telling case, noting how Bengal's *dhakis* (an untouchable/lower caste group who both make and play another religious percussion instrument, *dhak*) are treated as scavengers after ritual feasts and offered leftover food with dogs on soiled plates. They are critically instrumental during the worship of the mother goddess but afterwards treated as indistinguishable from food waste leftover after higher touchable castes have eaten.

The metaphoric deployment of *ucchishta*, I argue, is appropriate also because touch and smell/taste are most proximate senses and thus operational in the discourse of untouchability. Now, a number of related Sanskrit/Bengali terms have the sonic preponderance of the 'chh' sound: for instance, *chh(n)oya* (touch), *achhyut* (untouchable), *ucchishta* (leftover), and 'chh' belongs to the *talavya* (palatal) group of Bengali letters. While the palate is associated with taste specifically, and is also a metonym for aesthetics generally, the *talu* of *talavya* refers both to the palate and the inner side of the palms. The sensory worlds of craftsmanship, (un) touchability, aesthetics, and language are thus subtly connected as part of a metaphoric cosmos and cognitive unconscious, bridging the distance between the abstract and immediate, sense and sensation (see Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Low 1994: 140–143). Also, sound, as argued earlier, is precariously proximate with touch, especially in its 'reversible' dimension, and in a sense even closer to the immediate body since it lacks the 'elusive membrane of distance', which is organic to touch (Guru and Sarukkai 2012: 163–164). To become modern, denying its touchlike, anti-modern, self-effacing, unreflective immersion, sound sanitizes itself. It touches cleaned leather and hands/ears of audiences while forgetting and making untouchable the skin-hands of its creator.

Translating Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Guru writes, 'Modernity forces untouchability to descend deep down to the bottom of the *Brahmanical mind*' (2012: 203). So, while urban sacrality, including its soundscapes, are being increasingly secularized through idioms of competition, innovation, specialization, classicism, etc., the sensory substrates and their most complex graphic interweavings very subtly still cling to post-secular nostalgias and embodied caste practices. These urban anxieties are at once modern and Brahmanical, and their affective force in ordinary urban life, to quote Kathleen Stewart, is '[a]t once abstract and concrete, it's both a distant, untouchable order of things and a claustrophobically close presence' (Stewart 2007: 87 cited in Mazzarella 2017:10).

Notes

1 I follow ethnographic conventions in not naming my interlocutors.
2 See also Margolis 1960: 82–87.

3 Krishna gives minute details of the *mrdangam* making process: from carving the body with the jackfruit tree wood, intricate rationales for using different kinds of skin layerings of animals and their body parts, which impact the instrument's tone and pitch, the use of natural chemical substances like rice paste, etc. (2020: 3, 158–159, 160, 180–181, 197, 233–234, 236). A lot of these processes are similar to stages of *khol* construction.

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9 Mourning in the city

Imambaras as sites of urban contestation in Kolkata

Epsita Halder

The trailer of the Bengali mainstream film *Zulfiqar*, released in October 2016, opens with iconic shots of Kolkata's landmark Howrah Bridge, its biggest socio-religious Hindu festival, the Durga Puja, and its Nobel laureate poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The running titles announce, 'In the land of the bridge; in the land of the Puja; in the land of Tagore: there lives another land'.[1] With these ominous words, blood splashes on the venerated photograph of Tagore, and the camera rolls away from these familiar scenes to reveal 'another land', Khidirpur, a densely crowded, largely Muslim area extending from the river-front into Kolkata's south-west. To create a visual language for this 'small country inside the city of Kolkata', 'without a national anthem or a flag', 'where crimes live happily ever after', the camera eye rapidly journeys across the dockyards to reveal the narrow lanes and by-lanes of a shabby, poor, Muslim neighbourhood, picking out unfamiliar ritual elements that would provide an intense sensory impact – the frenzied beating of drums, self-flag-ellation with blades and chains by Shia men, women venerating the hooves of Husayn's horse, Muslim children playing with toy swords – juxtaposed with the strokes of a butcher's cleaver, gun executions, and a panning shot showing a congregation of Muslims praying, in silence, in the courtyard of a humble mosque. Sacred acts of veneration and mourning at the time of Muharram are conjoined with scenes of violence and crime, creating Muslim stereotypes that populate this other space, the others' place, in a seamless equation.

These cinematic choices do not necessarily reveal Islamophobia in the director, Srijit Mukherjee, a self-proclaimed member of the secular Bengali intelligentsia, not a right-wing conservative. But popular cinema subscribes to an internalized set of stereotypes at the core of Bengali Hindu cultural discourses, which have instilled a deep-rooted apathy towards knowing their Muslim neighbours in the city and the everyday realities they inhabit. *Zulfiqar* was no exception.

This chapter opens up a reading of everyday religion and religiosity per-formed by Shia Muslims in Kolkata as markers of their ghettoized identity. It engages with the Imambaras (the central, sacred institution for the Shias and the primary space for Shia ritual mourning) as sites of urban contesta-tion in Kolkata. Much ethnographic scholarship focuses on the idea of the 'Muslim Ghetto' as a product of socio-economic-spatial marginalization

reinforced by mainstream society, and the self-segregation of the community as a safety measure (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Kanchana 2012; Mohammad-Arif 2012). Studies have observed that Muslim habitats have been ghettoized by the growing communalization of the city's demography that diminished possibilities of mutual contact and exchange (Chatterjee 2017; Chatterji 2007: 23–33). Within these Muslim ghettos, the commemoration of Muharram places Shias in a precarious position as a doubly marginalized community vis-à-vis the majority Sunnis, who denounce the practice for its raw physicality, for its renegade insistence upon an intercessory piety directed towards Prophet Muhammad's grandson Imam Husayn, and for claiming a prophetic inheritance that goes directly against the Sunni caliphate. I read the Imambaras not as pure ritual spaces but as contested sites, where the Shias struggle to inculcate and invest new symbolic meanings to affirm their identity as a doubly minoritized community. I will show how such 'place-making' actions (Desplat and Schulz 2012) by the Shias are intertwined with opportunities and constraints embedded in particular local and urban experiences. I will read micro-level activities at three Imambaras in Kolkata in the broader context of a trans-territorial, multi-local network of belonging for the Shias while at the same time engaging with the historical and political dimensions of citizenship for the community.[2]

History, citizenship, identity

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, the dispute over succession culminated in the murder of the Prophet's grandson Imam Husayn and his small band of soldiers at the battle of Karbala in 680 CE, splitting the Muslim community into two primary sects, the Sunnis and the Shias. While this event bears similar connotations of loss across both sects (since Husayn was the grandson of the Prophet), the Shias identified as the people of Husayn, commemorating his martyrdom through physical expressions of grief and chanting of elegies, which Sunnis regarded as un-Islamic (Pinault 1992; Holtmann 2014). Shias also disregarded the Sunni caliphate in favour of their own line of inheritance, beginning with Imam Ali (Muhammad's daughter Fatima's husband), followed by the descendants of Muhammad through Fatima, with Husayn, her son, the martyr, as the third Imam, and continuing to the 12th Imam Muhammad al-Mehdi.

The Shias are doubly minoritized in India, where Sunnis constitute the majority of the Muslim community. Sunni scriptures, updated at various stages of Islamic history, categorically invalidated Shia intercessory piety towards their imams and Shia forms of mourning (Ismaeel 1983). Shia mourning during Muharram thus figured as a symbolic critique of the Sunni caliphate and by extension as a critique of Sunni political power (Marcinkowski 2004; Rezavi 2017). Thus the Imambara, too, as the ritual space of congregation for collective mourning, became a living threat to Sunni institutions. Following persecution and social ostracization by conservative Sunni regimes in the medieval period, sectarian marginalization of the

Shias, in the postcolonial Indian context, no longer has the same political implications since the state is conceptually secular. Conflict with the majority Sunnis is now played out in debates over the prophetic inheritance, Shia intercessory piety, and forms of mourning that the Sunnis abhor. In this context, any study of socio-economic marginality that bypasses the specific positioning of the Shia community will be counterproductive, as citizenship status in India for any community, unlike for the western secular political subject, does not stand on the complete 'splitting' into two subjectivities, public citizen of the state and the private citizen of a religion (Asad, 2003: 39–42). Rather, citizenship rights and the right of access to public spaces as an individual or community are articulated via the community's identitarian status – defined by religion, caste, or ethnicity – which both segregates and empowers it.

Shia sectarian identity is only exposed during the public procession of Muharram on the day of Ashura, and they are otherwise not distinguishable from their Sunni co-religionists in everyday public appearance.[3] The private mourning rituals and chanting of elegies inside the Imambaras remain invisible; they are not part of public experience and memory. Though non-Shia (Jalais 2014) and non-Muslim participation in the Ashura procession affirms the peripheries of Husayn-centric piety as malleable and inclusive, Imambaras remain an exclusive space of religious action for the Shias without any interface with mainstream social spaces.

My study focuses on three Kolkata Imambaras – Sibtainabad Imambara (in Metiabruz), Bibi Anaro Imambara (near Ripon Street), and Haji Imambara (on Portuguese Church Street) for micro-level case studies on how these sites are predicated upon grounded, everyday actions, often with the express intention to draw new historical relevance, affirm citizenship, and blur the boundaries between the secular and the sacred in urban spaces. Whether by opening up the Imambara to form a part of the mainstream public space (Sibtainabad Imambara) or by imbibing a kind of pan-territorial Shia symbolism through architectural renovation and reformulation of mourning rituals (Bibi Anaro Imambara) or by replacing ritual with the archiving of legal documents online (Haji Karbalai Imambara), these Imambaras become both lived spaces and political sites for the Shia community.

Sham-e Azadi: An evening of freedom

On the afternoon of 7 April 2019, people alighted from local auto rickshaws, Uber taxis, yellow cabs, and the odd car or two at the gate of the Sibtainabad Imambara in Metiabruz, Kolkata, and congregated on its verandah. They had not gathered to participate in the collective ritual mourning for Imam Husayn but to celebrate Begum Hazrat Mahal's 140th death anniversary with her kin, her great-grandson and great-granddaughter, and SNAP (Social Network for Association to People), a non-governmental organization focused on safety and protection for minorities in West Bengal.

Otherwise a private sacred space, this particular Imambara has recently attained visibility on the city's heritage walk map. The heritage walk is geared towards highlighting the erstwhile presence of north Indian royalty as a marker of the city's past cosmopolitan culture. In the summer of 1856, the exiled Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh arrived in Calcutta with his wives, concubines, courtesans, and retainers, bringing his music and poetry with him. To make his exile bearable, the nawab created an echo of his beloved Lucknow in Kolkata's Metiabruz, hosting Kathak performances to the accompaniment of his own *ghazals*; in the same emotional vein, he fostered a cult of ritual mourning for Imam Husayn's martyrdom. As Shia Awadh and its dethroned ruler grew tenuous roots in the southern fringes of colonial Calcutta, artisans and professionals from north India migrated there in search of livelihoods and began to create their own artefacts on Kolkata's soil. With Wajid Ali Shah came the elegies for Imam Husayn, ritual objects, relics, royal attire, and utensils from Lucknow to recreate the home left behind. But the replicas of the *rauza* (tomb) of Imam Husayn and *alam* (standards) of the martyrs, the names of *panjatan pak* ('the sacred five', Muhammad, Fatema, Ali, Hasan and Husayn), and commemorative elegies incited no more interest as tools of community history in the locals than the dazzling glass chandeliers, which always glowed with the remembrance of a royal past.

But today's gathering was different. Today, Wajid Ali Shah looked down at the audience from the flex banner as the husband of freedom fighter Begum Hazrat Mahal. When Lucknow fell into the hands of the British in 1856, Begum Hazrat Mahal did not follow her husband to Metiabruz. Instead, she organized an anti-British alliance to fight the East India Company. Now, over 160 years later, a civic assembly comprising writers, documentary film-makers, environmental activists, teachers, and researchers gathered at the Imambara led by Association SNAP under their 'Know Your Neighbours' programme to learn about a Muslim queen identified as a freedom fighter in the discourse of the Indian independence movement. Her rebellion against the British was thus offered by the Imambara on this occasion to erase the stamp of the 'outsider' from her community.

The royal Awadhi symbol of a double fish on the banner gently stirred in the breeze, the smell of *biryani* wafted down from upstairs. Later in the evening, we were all invited for Awadhi style *kebabs*, *biryani*, and *halwa* in a room on the upper storey meant for official meetings, while 12 royal figures down to the last nawab looked down from their framed photographs, seemingly appreciating the authentic fare and hospitality of the catering service run by the ruler's great-granddaughter, Manzilat Fatema.

Migration and monumentalization: Shia Muslim religious sites in Kolkata

Carrying the aura of Wajid Ali Shah, Sibtainabad Imambara continued to enjoy its position among the sites of urban exotica, while the local Shia elite failed to acquire functional space in the emergent colonial economy. Except

for Sibtainabad, no other Muslim religious site in Kolkata has managed to invoke an interest in the mainstream, except for the Nakhoda mosque in central Kolkata, where the liberal Hindu middle class invite themselves to indulge in authentic north Indian cuisines during Ramadan. But neither the sacred space nor the cuisine has bridged the incommensurable gap between middle-class Hindu Bengalis and their Muslim others. Scholarly studies on the Kolkata mosques are scant and yet to encompass the history of the Imambaras. No interdisciplinary study of the sub-community has been attempted so far.

The city of Calcutta, having emerged accidentally from the malaria-prone swamps of lower Bengal after a colonial official saw its potential as a trade centre close to the mouth of a mighty river, lacked any medieval or early modern Muslim heritage, unlike many other parts of Bengal.[4] Following the deposition of Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh (1856) and the death of Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1799), their exiled families and supporters settled in colonial Calcutta (Llewellyn-Jones 2014; Nair 2004). Indo-Islamic architecture changed the city's landscape as Muslim religious sites proliferated. Tipu's 11th son Ghulam Muhammad Shah consecrated a mosque and an Imambara in Tollygunj (1835) and another mosque in Dharmatala (1842) in his father's name. Such sites enabled the new arrivals to function as a cohesive community in their new settlements. Later, influxes of Shia migrants from different parts of India increased the number of religious sites, but small-scale patronage did not always follow the same templates of Islamic architecture. Sacred sites designated as *waqf* lands, reserved for the privileged disposition of the patron family or the Muslim community as a whole, never came under the colonial land policy (Beverley, 2011).[5] None of these *waqf* estates, be they mosques, Imambaras, *khanqahs*, *dargahs*, or burial grounds, could be turned into dead monuments symbolizing or commemorating a historical idea, event, or person (Ahmed 2014: 33–36). Rather, most of these sites have been kept alive and are used by the community for collective religious observance. In this context of two different knowledge systems – the essentially colonial understanding of the monument and the system of *waqf* – the interpretations of religious sites, historical architecture, and Muslim heritage continued to clash until 1913 when the Waqf al-Aulad Act was passed to recognize the local social context of Muslim rights over any religious site within the framework of colonial knowledge.[6]

Though the trail of 'archaeological remains' from the medieval and early modern period, including both functional and non-functioning sites, has come to formulate the history of Muslim Bengal, Muslim religious sites in colonial Calcutta were not included under 'Indian Muslim Architectural Heritage', a favourite category in colonial archaeological discourses. Older mosques associated with a Muslim royal lineage like the Adina mosque in Gaur (1375), the Qutb Shahi Mosque in Pandua (1583), or the Kolkata mosque in Murshidabad (1723–1724) have ceased to be a part of living ritual tradition and have been turned into heritage sites or monuments of the past.[7] Even the functioning Nizamat Imambara of Murshidabad (1847) was taken

over by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and there have been constant negotiations between the Murshidabad *waqf* estate and the ASI to determine the patterns of maintenance, conservation, and observance of religious functions at the Imambara, closed for rituals except in the month of Muharram.[8] But other than the Nizamat Imambara, not a single Imambara in West Bengal has come under the supervision of the ASI, though the ASI did not demarcate between the functional (e.g. the Nizamat Imambara) and the non-functional (e.g. the Adina or Katra Mosques) to attempt acquisition of religious-historical sites. Monumentalization was driven by the intention of creating Islamic cultural heritage and establishing an *autonomous* governance of the state (through the ASI) over nineteenth-century constructions. But living sites were sometimes protected by *waqf* law, even when they bore a distinct architectural heritage – like the Nakhoda Mosque or the Hooghly Imambara (established by Haji Muhammad Mohsin, a Bengal philanthropist, in 1841, now maintained by the Haji Muhammad Mohsin Waqf estate). The independent *waqf* law thus created a disjunction between a central governing body like the ASI and Shia religious sites.

In the nineteenth century, Calcutta developed into a new urban centre of trade under the administration of the British East India Company, drawing Muslim communities from far and wide. The Muslim population in the city developed along regional-linguistic, professional, and sectarian lines, clustering together and then, in the subsequent decades of the twentieth century, overlapping with each other as the communities experienced growing economic hardship, and the city's geography aligned along communal lines. The Shias of Kolkata had mainly migrated from Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Gujarat with certain sub-sectarian and linguistic variations and had gradually started to live in separate quarters from the Sunnis. Subsequently, as the Shias coming from different regions started to share the same local Imambaras, their urban habitations overlapped. Due to spatial marginalization as Muslims, and sectarian marginalization within, the Shias came to live in ghettos-within-Muslim-ghettos. The Imambaras grew in number from the early twentieth century, but as the glory of the Shia royalty faded, they became increasingly obscure and almost invisible as part of a social-religious living space owing to their double-minority status.

The community and its ghettos: Marginality, sectarian identity, and contestation

The deported royal families, along with their community, scattered to other parts of the city in search of means of livelihood, and their original places of settlement – i.e. the Tollygunge area for Tipu's family and Metiabruz for the descendants of Wajid Ali Shah, both typically Shia in sectarian identity – became settlements for the migrated Sunni Muslims as well. Tipu's son Ghulam Muhammad bought land and rented a house in Dharamtalla where he built a mosque. Wajid Ali Shah's grandson and most of the other important Awadhi families moved to a by-lane near Entally. In general, Sunnis and

Shias of varied linguistic and regional affiliations finally settled in the same Muslim localities in the colonial city.

The patterns of Muslim migration and settlement in Kolkata, previously unexplored, were systematically studied by Kenneth McPherson (1974) and M.K.A. Siddiqui (1979), for whom occupational social identity was a central criterion. Recent studies on the reorganization of Muslim settlements from occupation-based clusters to communal demarcations during and after the Partition of India do not employ the criteria of sectarian cleavages to understand their internal dynamics and contestations and negotiations within and outside the ghetto. An exception is Annu Jalais's important work on the commemoration of Muharram by the Bihari Muslims, shedding light on the connection between faith, contestation over urban space, and regional identity as markers within the Muslim community.

Jalais's discussions (2014; 2015: 160–190) of Muharram rituals performed by Bihari Sunnis succeeds in bringing out the liminal position of a migrated Sunni community in relation to their Sunni brethren who do not publicly commemorate Muharram, and the Shias, for whom Muharram is central. By contrast, Anasua Chatterjee's reading of the ghettoized life of the Muslims in the micro-locality of Park Circus (2017) maps their marginality but entirely bypasses the intersectarian issues in that area. Her reference to the Shias in Park Circus (only three pages in her 172-page book) reaffirms their double marginalization within the sectarian multiplicity, but her argument gets lost in generalized, misleading interpretations of the sectarian relevance of Muharram: 'the local tank and the two adjoining playgrounds in Kasaibagan constitute the site of Karbala for a large part of city's *Muslims*, and Muharram *taziyas* are immersed in them every year by *Sunnis* from all across Kolkata' (Chatterjee 2017: 42, emphasis mine). Ethnographic study of the local history of Muslim neighbourhoods, thus, stops at the gates of the Imambaras.

Shia marginality forms a part, an invisibilized subset, of general Muslim marginality with its social and religious invalidation of the community itself as the 'other' sect in India. But unlike the neighbouring Sunni-majority Islamic states of Pakistan and Bangladesh, postcolonial India does not require Shias to negotiate with Sunni political power. The Shia-Sunni rivalry over prophetic inheritance and enchanted forms of grieving at the time of Muharram remain the exclusive internal dissimilarity for Muslim sectarian differences. However, public Muharram processions and private mourning in the interiority of the Imambaras, while continuing to pose a counter-narrative to a pan-Islamic Sunni caliphate, do not have any direct or symbolic, national or local, political implications in India. In pre-colonial Islamicate India, trans-territorial differences between the Sunni caliphate and the Shia imamate led to the persecution of the Shias under more conservative Sunni regimes (Rezavi 2017). Sunni-Shia clashes continued in the post-independence period, especially in north India, though they were minimal in West Bengal. But constant references to such incidents from neighbouring north Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and stories of persecution and riots during Muharram keep streaming in from far and near Sunni Islamic

states, creating a perennial sense of anxiety and anticipation of coercion, even if they are not actualized in West Bengal. Sunnis continue to condemn the physically enchanted Shia modalities of showing grief – chest-beating, tearful chanting of elegies, and self-flagellation. Within the ghettos, Shias and Sunnis share the same economic marginalization and lack of access to mainstream spaces. Yet Shia religiosity is marked by an apology, always uttered in a language of defense and performed in obscure invisibility, compared to the visible validation of Sunni mosques and their public sonic declaration of religiosity during *azaan*, the public call for prayer.

During the *Ashura* procession of Muharram, the Shia community takes to the streets carrying the decorated *taziyeh*, beating their chests to the rhythm of elegies, and flagellating themselves. This, however, is looked at with curiosity, and even with frank disapproving wonder, by many Sunnis and non-Muslims. Shia double-minority status nuances our understanding of Muslim ghettos, makes visible new boundaries and schisms, and brings to light attempts to create interfaces at different levels, sectarian and otherwise. Curiously, the Shias consider the state as their benefactor. To control sectarian clashes, which generally erupt during Muharram rallies, the administration takes safety measures, including surveillance and barricading of the processions – measures that the Shia community interprets as protection and safety provided to them here in West Bengal and denied in other Sunni-dominated states.

Contestation and affirmation: safety, security, and the citizen subject

Sibtainabad Imambara: The rediscovery of royal Muslim heritage

At the beginning of the *Sham-e-Azadi* ceremony, the graves of the sons and grandsons of Wajid Ali Shah were offered rose petals inside the Imambara. Only the men of the family had the privilege of burial inside the sacred space of the Imambara, their family *waqf*. But the rediscovery of Begum Hazrat Mahal as an icon of the Indian Independence movement has endowed the Sibtainabad Imambara with a new meaning. SNAP is attempting to bridge the spatio-social boundaries between the mainstream public sphere and the Muslim ghettos in Metiabruz. When the whole country is threatened by reinvigorated attempts at vilifying and branding Indian Muslims as 'infiltrators' and 'deportable foreigners' by ultra-right Hindu political parties, such reclamations of history ideologically reaffirm the Indianness of Muslims.[9]

Such a reclamation attempts to dissociate Muslims from the ideology of political separatism that blames them for the creation of Pakistan. Hazrat Mahal validates the claim for Muslims as insiders, but the process obliterates local, economic, and sectarian nuances of the community and re-inscribes Muslims within the discourse of royal heritage. The constant invocation of noble lineage, the emphasis on the conjugal primacy of Hazrat Mahal and Wajid Ali Shah, silencing the existence of the nawab's other women, and the foregrounding of Awadhi culinary culture failed to contextualize the historical

relevance of Hazrat Mahal's rebellion. On the one hand, Indian Muslims appeared as a broad monolithic category, acceptable only for their royal past, as exotica. Thus the *ghazals* and *ghoongroos* (anklets) of Wajid Ali Shah and his impeccable Lakhnavi manners produce a popular understanding of 'Awadhi Calcutta' that does not let the forms of devotionalism observed by the nawab and his community enter the discussion. On the other hand, the much-awaited validation of Hazrat Mahal's rebellion, and its secularization inside the Imambara, does not touch upon its historical-social complexities. The Pandora's box of religious-sectarian affiliation, the political relevance of Muharram, and the socio-historico-economic context of a doubly marginalized community remains unopened. Hazrat Mahal herself emerges in an iconic imaginary, obliterating the facts of her marital estrangement, her half-African descent, her former status as a courtesan, and her political alliances with subaltern lower-caste groups during the 1857 Rebellion. The families of her progeny also emerge, marked with a royal lineage, reinvigorated with rediscovered elements of Muslim history, as articulated in their Facebook presence or their catering business. Such processes are enabling for these particular families but are predicated upon their appropriation of an Indian Muslim royal past, erasing sectarian issues.

The heritage walk, on the other hand, offers living religious sites to walkers as monuments, unconnected to the affective-social-religious moorings of the community. Hazrat Mahal's commemorative ritual invisibilizes the relics of Karbala inside the Imambara – the replicas of Husayn's grave, his horse Duldul, the *alams* (standards) of his companions, or Akbar's cradle – while foregrounding the graves of Wajid Ali's heirs. In both cases, the religious fails to get transformed into the historical, and the Imambara becomes a secular inclusive physical space where tourists can come and go, and everyone, irrespective of religion, can engage in place-making activities. Instead of standing outside the ghettos, the mainstream public can walk in through the gate, become participants in community space and place-making, and select or reject various community practices to create new versions of history.

Bibi Anaro Imambara: Trans-territorial expansion of architecture

The gates of Bibi Anaro Imambara were made higher and sturdy decorated grilles were installed when the Imambara was renovated and enlarged into a two-storey structure in 2011. A separate space, the only exclusive one in the city, was allotted for women's *majlis* on the upper floor (Halder 2019). Architectural modifications like a separate staircase entry and a tiled fountain in the courtyard re-inscribed more structured rituals linked to north Indian patterns of preaching and mourning, with gender segregation being facilitated.[10] The expanded space and reinvigorated rituals increased the importance of this Imambara within the network of Imambaras in the city.

In my several visits there since 2011, I attempted to understand the religious-affective meanings of mourning rituals between sacred purpose and everyday sociality in this Imambara and how the community conducts its

religious and social life. As I saw mounds of cement and sand, piles of iron rods, and stacks of tiles give birth to a glittering white mansion with tall, impressive facades, doors, and windows with Indo-Iranian arches, the Imambara brought together migrant Shias from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the area between Entally and Ripon Street as one Shia Ithna Ashari community.[11]

Shia religiosity is marked by a constant trans-territorial flow of elegy texts and visual piety around ritual relics, which intrigued me to find out more about the template for this architectural renovation. Searches on Google using a number of keywords finally yielded a photograph of the renovated Bibi Zaynab shrine in Syria, where after the Iraq-Iran War, the upper storey had been consecrated and allotted to women (Aghaie 2009; Rizvi 2015). Men gathered in the courtyard at Bibi Anaro eagerly told me that the cement replica of a leather waterbag at the centre of the fountain represented one belonging to Husayn's half-brother Imam Abbas, who was killed at Karbala while bringing water for the children of the Prophet's family.

Eventually, while exploring the network of circulation of Shia Islamic books in Urdu and Hindi around Rabindra Sarani in Central Kolkata, I ended up, in spirit, in the courtyard of the Sayyed Abbas Dargah of Lucknow. Both the façade of the Dargah and a similar fountain with a cement replica of the leather bag of Abbas in the courtyard revealed the multi-local origin of artefacts accessed by the Shias of Ripon Street through the internet and social media. Physical travel to the sacred pilgrimage sites in Central Asia or important North Indian Shia centres has never been a general practice among Kolkata's Shias for obvious economic reasons, especially in the absence of any centralized patronage of *ziyara*. The community, at various levels, is now virtually connected to Shia experiences across national boundaries through the use of social media or online websites. This has created a trans-territorial networked community for local Shias living in micro-social spaces. Because of the hegemonic presence of the Sunnis, and the overriding Sunni interpretation of Islam, Shias in India have hardly had an adequate presence or participation in Muslim institutions, whether in state-sponsored *madrasas*, the *waqf* board, or in local politics.[12] To counteract this, Shias have to project themselves as generalized Muslims blurring the sectarian difference-within, thus making their own religious concerns invisible. In secular discourses, from economic reports to academic works on the Muslims of Bengal, the absence of sectarian intersectionality as an analytical tool obliterates the specific religious dimensions of social marginalization.[13] The renovation of the Bibi Anaro Imambara, giving both men and women better access to organized ritual space, allowed them to affirm their sectarian identity within the ghettos. They were connected to a transnational, multi-local Shia visual discourse actualized through architecture. This reflected a new preparedness communicated to the public processions as well.

In this context, one should note the curious and layered Shia engagement with national and local politics. In the already low Muslim participation in Parliament and state assemblies, Shia presence is almost invisible. The Shia

community, by default, has to identify with the (Sunni) Muslim representative to cast votes, and at the social level of political functioning, Shia demands are doubly marginalized because of the reluctance of Sunni local councillors to address them.[14]

In the colonial history of Muharram, the gatherings of thousands of 'Muslims' with their physical expressions of grief had always created great unease for the British, and surveillance, in the interest of 'civic order,' involved the use of traffic regulations to control the ritual procession and avert Sunni-Shia clashes. Shias have come to interpret such state-level traffic regulations as civic security for the safe performance of their rituals, which, according to the Kolkata Shias, is never offered in neighbouring countries, such as Sunni-dominated Pakistan or Bangladesh. In the regional context, the all-inclusive patronage policy of the current ruling Trinamool Congress party in West Bengal includes Muharram. Makeshift platforms with party banners depicting the chief minister have started to pop up just opposite the Sibtainabad Imambara and in the neighbourhoods of Park Circus and Tiljala, two very old and densely populated Muslim ghettos, to remind the Shias of state benevolence in sustaining their commemorative ritual, even though governmental policies have not ensured their economic or social empowerment. Thus, Shias have gained a sense of security, even actualization of citizenship, from state-enabled access to public space for the commemoration of Muharram but little else.

Haji Kerbalai Imambara: Sacred property on Internet

I took a turn towards Portuguese Church Lane. It was 2016. Behind the imposing church, in a lane teeming with resting pushcarts, small shops, and old shabby buildings, I found the address I sought – 10, Portuguese Church Lane, Kolkata 700001. It was a typically dilapidated building with a façade that could not be seen in its entirety from where I stood. An A3-sized poster in Urdu on a closed section of the huge wooden door spoke of martyrdom, so I was sure that I was in front of the Haji Kerbalai Imambara. But apart from the door itself, the building's exterior was entirely hidden by tiny shops clustered together. Men stopped and looked askance as I entered, and three of them, including a boy, followed me in. It was a typical mid-nineteenth-century colonial building, with a rectangular courtyard in the middle and a sprawling three-storey structure around it, with balconies along the first floor. The courtyard was empty but for a solitary iron pole, bearing rather melancholic, worn-out black and green flags, and a banner with the symbol of the sacred *panjatan pak*. Pigeons cooed loudly as I took a step forward. The two men and the boy who had followed me watched me with uneasy curiosity as I clicked photographs of the green sacred flags. I had never before visited such a deserted and neglected Imambara. A sign above a locked grill door on the ground floor bore the name Haji Kerbalai Imambara. Other ground-floor rooms were tenanted, their nameplates showing the usual, endearing pan-Indian jumble, evidence of migration for economic reasons.

The letters HK, in uppercase, worked into the grille fencing the balcony, stood for Haji Kerbalai.

When do men come to mourn? – I asked, but the old man disappeared, and the boy followed him, responding reluctantly – when they feel like it. Taken aback by this unexpected reluctance, I began to climb the dark wooden stair-case to the upper storey, when a short man, looking visibly annoyed, came down to ask whether I had permission to take photographs. I showed him my photographs of the pigeons and the *panjatan pak* banner, and fumbled for a reply since I had never encountered such suspicion over my years of visiting Imambaras. I was told that I could not go upstairs without permission from those staying there. I called up Nizam Haider, one of the Imambara trustees, on my phone, but he was away: puzzled and heartbroken, I decided to pack up for the day.

Suddenly, the suspicious man came back and asked me to accompany him upstairs. Taken aback, I followed him silently to a balcony redolent with pigeon droppings, where two men were ready to welcome me. Yes, Nizam Haider, whose cell number I had acquired from www.imamproperty.com, a website archiving and digitizing materials relating to Imambaras under *waqf* law, had called from Metiabruz to inform them about my visit. At the office, the manager Muhammad Ali and his young nephew Abu Baqr told me that the Imambara, built by an Iranian merchant in 1856, had been embroiled in a long legal battle to recover the *waqf* estate from illegal encroachers after the Mutawallis (custodians) were indicted for dereliction in 1967 and a board of trustees constituted. But internal corruption and illegal encroachment con-tinued, and on 13 July 1997, a physical struggle took place between the illegal occupants and the local Shia community. Following legal intervention, the keys were handed over to the board of trustees.

The uncle-nephew duo reaffirmed the history that appears on the website. No, they had not consulted the website themselves, being unused to doing so, though to me the younger one appeared quite net savvy. Muhammad Ali had no clue, but the nephew, Abu, googled the Imambara's date of foundation and my name on his cell phone. The date could not be found, but they con-firmed that the present trustees took over the keys from the court in 2011, and since then, the trustees have been charged with maintaining the material and spiritual status of the Imambara, and 1,500,000 rupees have been spent on repairs.

A bunch of keys was brought from an inner room, and Muhammad Ali led me along the cracked floors of a long corridor, opening a succession of worn-out wooden doors. Finally, the last door was opened. I gasped as my eyes were dazzled by the unexpected beauty and grandeur of a huge mourning hall inside this shabby, melancholic mansion. The light sparkled off Belgian glass chandeliers, glittering in rectangles on the floor as it shone through the full-length coloured glass windows. Huge mirrors, their metal-and-wood frames carved with lions and fish, the typical Iranian symbols, attested the Imambara's trans-territorial connections to the Shia ideological centre in Iran, perhaps through Lucknow. My involuntary exclamation that this might

rival the royal Imambara in Metiabruz pleased Muhammad Ali visibly. Was I the first visitor from outside the community? Perhaps so. Another smaller hall on the ground floor held a replica of the Jannat-ul-Baqi, or the tombs of the Prophet's family, and various shrines, including one to the youngest of Karbala's martyrs, Ali al-Asghar ibn Husayn.

But how did all this begin? Who was Haji Muhammad Aga Khan, the founder? When did this Urdu-speaking community start commemorating Muharram in this part of Kolkata, settling between the river and a textile market (Sutanuti) that predates the British? Could the squatters' encroachments be an indication of the community's socio-economic marginalization, a marker of decay? Was their prioritization of online publication over regular ritual assemblies a strategic use of new media, making an identitarian bid for the Imambara's physical survival and ownership status? Inside that glittering hall, I could understand the reasons behind the online claim and the offline anxiety and suspicion. The initial mistrust towards me was justified since the Imambara was threatened by trespassers and forced occupancy. Publishing legal documents on 'imamproperty.com' affirmed the trustees' claim over the property and betrayed their insecurity over losing a sacred site. The website, documenting an entire array of reclaimed Shia *waqf* properties, offers more than virtual devotion. Rather, it creates an archive of tangible belonging, marking the community's places of settlement in virtual space online.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the embodied forms of Shia religious actions in the broader context of the community's engagement with its own sacred sites and the urban cityscape. The sacred space of the Imambara becomes a contested social site where ritual actions and intentions, and how they are ideated and performed in relation to trans-regional and local scenarios can be considered civic and political activities. In such a context of contestation, modes of participation are directed by the community's will towards self-defence and self-identification. Not just the public Ashura procession but also the interiority of the Imambaras, their reformulation of ritual events, and reorganization of artefacts and architecture escape the private domain of religion and connect to public affairs. At the same time, overt attempts to accommodate a religious site to civic discourses, as in the Sibtainabad Imambara, might bypass the core religiosity of the community. These multiple intentions of Kolkata's Shia communities inflect the status of Imambaras as a social site and a basis for identity and citizenship.

Citizenship, here, must affirm Shia sectarian religiosity against invalidation by the Sunnis and overall ignorance in a Hindu-dominated public sphere. But, as my ethnographic research shows, such affirmations might not produce a general principle of identity. Members of the Haji Kerbalai Imambara appear to lack direct social articulation, choosing to preserve their religious legacy through online activities, though they are also engaged in legal and material efforts at preservation. Thus religious action is context-specific since the authors of such

actions are located in various conjunctures of the everyday experience of the city. These contexts are grounded not only in the urban space marked as Kolkata but also in Kolkata's varied micro-local socialities, where different micro-communities within the urban Shia community emerge and are consolidated by a spatial organization of their religious obligations. If we examine a network of Imambaras in the city to understand the embeddedness of religious actions as forms of urban contestation, we can discern how identity is created between the transnational and the local. Locational differences mark the varying degrees of participation in the religious activities at the Imambaras, whose relevance and meaning also vary according to the Shia communities that share them.

Notes

1 *Zulfiqar* official trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OdOORa-7zI. Accessed on 4 April 2020. The quotations are from the subtitles.
2 Place-making capacities have been studied by scholars in a 'post-secular world' to understand their effects at varying spatial scales, with special emphasis on contested identities and intercultural negotiations. In the Indian context, the question of negotiation and search for recognition play out through multiple temporalities embedded in urban spaces and the history of contestations over the socio-religious sphere.
3 Ashura is the tenth day of the month of Muharram and the final day of the battle of Karbala when Imam Husayn was killed. On this day, Shias mourn in public processions coming out of the interiority of the Imambaras.
4 Bengal has a vast repository of Muslim cultural heritage dating from the early sultanate, especially the famous mosques in Murshidabad and Malda districts.
5 *Waqf*, according to the Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), means claimless donation of land or building for Muslim charitable or religious purposes. *Waqf* properties are exempted from tax and cannot be appropriated by the state. Colonial law, continuously negotiating with religious claims, recognized that religious charitable trusts like *waqf* were outside state jurisdiction, and *waqf* emerged as an autonomous system of trusteeship. Even religious architecture on those lands could not easily be 'monumentalized' or treated as 'heritage'. Thus the *waqf* system differentiates Muslim religious sites from world heritage sites, though struggles over heritage continue.
6 As Ahmed shows, the colonial archaeological department had considerable interest in the mosques in Gaur or Pandua, where the patron authority, the Muslim royal power, had become extinct.
7 Monument studies distinguish between functional sites, those used by the community for various purposes, and non-functional sites such as ruins, sites that are no longer venerated but are endowed with local religious meanings (Ahmed 2014:3).
8 Construction of the Hussainiya (place of mourning for Husayn) in Murshidabad commenced in 1804–1805 and was completed in 1847 after the royal palace. The rise of Calcutta overshadowed Murshidabad, and the Nizamat Imambara's glory as a religious site faded, transforming it into a centre of local piety (Asher 1992: 328–334)
9 Amit Shah, former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president and Home Minister, tweeted, 'We will ensure implementation of NRC in the entire country. We will remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha, Hindus and Sikhs: Shri @AmitShah#NaMoForNewIndia, 11 April 2019, https://twitter.com/bjp4india/status/1116246724119371776?lang=en, accessed on 12.04.2019.

10 See Epsita Halder, 'Mourning over Karbala: Rethinking Ritual Actions of Shia Women in Kolkata' in *Psychoanalytic and Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Women in India*, ed. Paula Ellman, Jhuma Basak, and Gertraud Schlesinger-Kipp (Routledge, forthcoming). See also Khan 2007.

11 The Ithna Ashari or Twelver Shias are the largest sub-sect of the Shias, believing in intercessory piety towards the 12 Imams from Imam Ali, till the 12th Imam, Imam Mehdi.

12 During British rule, all Muslim *waqf* properties came under the Waqf Registration Act (1935), but the Shias did not have a separate *waqf* board, resulting in their dissatisfaction with the management of Shia *waqf* under Sunni control. In West Bengal, there was an agitation demanding a separate board in 2006, which resulted in the creation of a Shia chair on the Sunni *waqf* board, but no autonomous status was granted.

13 The Rajinder Sachar commission was instituted in 2005 by the then prime minister of India, Manmohan Singh, to study the economic and social conditions of Muslims in India. It reported their appalling living conditions but did not address any sectarian issues.

14 In the last Lok Sabha (parliamentary) elections (2019), Muslims and scheduled castes generally voted for the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal (an alliance of Dalit–other backward classes and Muslim groups against the Hindu right-wing BJP); the Shias decided to favour the BJP as more likely to address their demands.

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10 Performing processions

Claiming the city[1]

Nilanjana Gupta

> Some years ago a priest was drawn on a cart through the streets of
> Naples for indecent offences. He was followed by a crowd hurling
> maledictions. At a corner a wedding procession appeared. The priest
> stands up and makes the sign of blessing and the cart's pursuers fall
> on their knees. So absolutely, in this city, does Catholicism strive to
> reassert itself in every situation. Should it disappear from the face of
> the earth, its last foothold would perhaps be not Rome, but Naples.
>
> 'Naples', Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis

When Walter Benjamin (and Lacis) write of Naples as a city, it is with an
attitude that can be seen as rather disapproving. The inhabitants are described
as living out their lives with a 'rich barbarism' where 'in common with the
African kraal, each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of com-
munal life. To exist, for the Northern European the most private of affairs, is
here, as in the kraal, a collective matter'. The market places are 'bazaars' full
of 'blissful confusion' which outdo the 'department store, in other cities the
rich magnetic center of purchasing' by their 'tightly packed multiplicity'
(Benjamin 1979: 170–171). The word Benjamin uses most frequently to
describe what he sees as the chaotic life, architecture, and everyday practices
of the 'indolent' city of Naples is *porous*. This 'porosity' 'preserve[s] the scope
to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellation. The stamp of the defin-
itive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its
"thus and not otherwise"' (ibid. 166).

   A defining element of modernist city planning is the demarcation of spaces
for specific purposes, populations, or usage, be it Georges-Eugène
Haussmann's plan for Paris, Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept, Le
Corbusier's visualization of the Radiant City, Frank Lloyd Wright's utopian
Broadacre City, or the colonial master plans for the 'second city of the
empire' Calcutta (now Kolkata). Coordinates determine the activities in each
segment. However, the people who inhabit the city-space act out, in their
lives, a stubborn refusal to be cordoned into the spaces identified for them
and thus we repeatedly see cities as sites of conflict, transgression, ebbs, and
flows rather than as static adherents to the ideas of their creators. These
transgressions, porosities to use Benjamin's terms, are often seen as threats

not just to 'law and order' but also the core ideology underlying the imaginary of the city – modernity. As Jane Jacobs put it in her now-classic book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, first published in 1961,

> Planners, architects of city design, and those they have led along with them in their beliefs are not consciously disdainful of the importance of knowing how things work. On the contrary, they have gone to great pains to learn what the saints and sages of modern orthodox planning have said about how cities ought to work and what ought to be good for people and businesses in them. They take this with such devotion that when contradictory reality intrudes, threatening to shatter their dearly won learning, they must shrug reality aside.
>
> (Jacobs 1992: 8)

In this chapter, the procession will be discussed as one way in which designated city spaces are disrupted, challenged, and claimed by people when they are constituents in what has been called the 'moving city' (Ostenberg et al. 2015). The procession is one of the many ways in which the porosity of city spaces is reiterated and the city is temporarily redefined by its otherwise invisible citizens.

Kolkata is a city famous and infamous for processions. There are processions every day, taken out by political parties, student groups, other organizations, or religious associations. Some are huge, causing traffic flows to be blocked. Others are smaller, but it is difficult to find an individual in the city who has not at some point in her life been part of a procession. The centrality of religious processions in the lives of various communities is recognized in the academic literature on South Asia (Van der Veer 2015: 89–130). However, most works which analyze the dynamics of the procession in India concentrate on conflicts generated from the actions of the moving body of people who form it (Hanchett 1972: 1517–1522; Jaffrelot 1998; Good 1999). Commenting on processions as a type of religious display, Knut Jacobsen writes,

> Processions are among the most striking visual displays of a religion. They reveal important aspects of religions. They are rituals but they are also much more. They display many of the dimensions of religion at the same time: art, sacred narratives, social hierarchies and competition, communities and identities. They are signals of social change. They are preservers of the past. They are continuously reinvented and may reflect strategies for groups to become visible in order to protect their place in the hierarchy or to compete for resources.
>
> (Jacobsen 2008: 7)

This chapter discusses the procession as a performative act which simultaneously constructs, and is constructed by, complex relationships and networks between community, space, religion, and state. Religious processions in

particular are temporal social formations which serve several purposes, fulfil particular needs, and raise certain questions about the ways in which secularism works, or does not work, in the Indian city space.

City spaces

In *Planning the City* (2012) Partho Datta detailed the conceptualization of Calcutta as a colonial city and the numerous plans, commissions, and committees through which the colonial administration sought to manage the so-called 'white town' meant for the British and Europeans, while the 'natives' created the enclave referred to as the 'black town'. Between these lay the intermediate area of the 'grey town', where settlers in neither category, like Armenians and Baghdadi Jews, were located. Kolkata was always a divided city, with regulated and demarcated spaces, not only for different races but also for particular activities. The College Street area, for example, is where all the teaching and research institutes originally stood. Naturally, bookstores, printers, and publishers all flourished nearby while ancillary trade by bookbinders or paper wholesalers inhabited the periphery of this area. Yet there are also disruptions and disjunctures between the planned, efficient city and the actual lived one. As in many Asian cities, slums or makeshift housing or non-planned settlements insert themselves into the matrix of the planned. Still, the stratified social fabric of Indian society makes it quite common for people to live spatially side by side for generations and not set foot in each other's area if the economic and social divide is wide enough.

Even today, one of the first questions Kolkatans ask when being introduced to someone is, 'Where do you live?' as the answer immediately provides clues to the person, her family, income, social standing, and other markers of identity (for example, a southern location might suggest a refugee colony set up in the aftermath of Partition). Neighbourhoods are structured by coordinates of class, religion, caste, and gender. To additionally complicate these features of all Indian spaces, urban or rural, cities like Calcutta/Kolkata, despite the planning ambitions of colonial administrators, have never been secular, as they were not constructed within what Talal Asad calls

> the modern imaginary that belongs to a democratic state. These are: first, the horizontal, direct-access character of modern society; and second, its grounding in secular, homogeneous time. Direct access is reflected in several developments: the rise of the public sphere (the equal right of all to participate in nationwide discussions), the extension of the market principle (all contracts are between legal equals), and the emergence of citizenship (based on the principle of individualism). Apart from the idea of a direct-access society, homogeneous time is a prerequisite for imagining the totality of individual lives that comprise a (national) community in which there are no privileged persons or events, and therefore no mediations.
>
> (Asad 2003: 2)

For colonial cities, none of the aforementioned prerequisites had organically evolved, nor were they created by the newly independent state. City spaces were built and remain within the imaginary of unquestioned inequalities and segregations. This fundamental problem of applying models or theories of modernity from the very particular historical time and space of the 'West' (actually, a small part of Europe) to other societies including the North American continent is recognized by critics on all sides of the debate from Charles Taylor to Jürgen Habermas. One of the major differences between the practice of religion in most countries identified as the 'West' and religious practice in South Asia is the fact that religion has not generally moved from the public to the private sphere, and, therefore, the public display of religious acts has always been part of city life. The Constitution of India guarantees the following:

Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion –

(1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

(Article 25)

Processions are one way in which religion is manifested across all of South Asia, in rural and urban spaces. A discussion of the procession may allow us to explore the ways in which religion is embedded in the everyday lives of citizens, especially when it is seen as a performative act:

> Approaching religion in the public sphere from the perspective of performance studies means both tracing and breaking apart the frames that both religion and secularism set up to cordon off one another's prohibited ground, a process of translation that exposes the untranslatable as well. It means seeking to understand when and how the two came to be separated, and how these frames are inflected and shaped by the discourse of power and history that came to define them. Performance, because it is neither simply a process, an event, nor an object, but rather an 'essentially contested concept' finally resists any theoretical 'place' or definition. It, too, is an undefinable – a 'performance' par excellence, existing as the effects of performative processes, rather than a reality bound by ontological affirmations.
>
> (Chambers et al. 2013: 28)

The public performance of religion can represent many things in a modern cityscape, and this discussion will try to identify some of them.

The fact that many processions culminate in conflict in India suggests that the act of walking in a procession as opposed to walking as an individual is a way of claiming territory. Everyday space, usually a street in a city, stops being a thoroughfare for people to use for their everyday needs and is transformed into what Charles Taylor described as an *enchanted* space, *claimed* for

a purpose different from what it represents in the secular plan. It is not just the physical street that becomes the ground for the performance, but the entire space occupied by the group of performers becomes sacrosanct in a very tangible way. That is why people, usually those individuals whose activities have been disrupted by the procession, wait patiently on the sides, cars, too, line up behind the moving mass and police personnel carefully stay outside the invisible boundaries that are created. There is an element of respect and acceptance of this transformative performance. Some individuals may attempt to cross through the procession, but that is usually prevented or disapproved of by the participants, intent on creating a sacred space for themselves. Such transgressions may give rise to loud altercations, even violence, as they are seen as intrusions or acts of disrespect.

Suzanne Hanchett's detailed fieldwork-based study of two processions in a village near Mysore discusses the way in which over time, the route of the processions had changed, reflecting the emerging power equations between the castes in the village (Hanchett 1972). By changing the route, the non-Brahman castes were challenging the norms of access based on caste hierarchies and set by traditions of untouchability. The procession becomes a community, solid and impenetrable by outsiders. The division between the participants or performers and the onlookers or audience is created by the performative act itself, which is conceived and enacted as a way of challenging or changing existing hegemonic social structures through the processional space.

Simultaneously, another level of bonding and community spirit is created within the group of participants. Many who participate in religious ritual speak of the sense of community and identity that is strengthened by an act performed collectively by persons unknown to each other. The act of prayer itself, where devotees chant or perform rituals known in common, manifests an 'imagined community' of believers. In a procession, the display of such commonality is in contrast to the non-belonging of the spectators. Many participants experience a sense of solidarity, created through collective devotional enactment. Terms such as 'stranger-relationality' and 'stranger-sociability' describe the formation of temporary and particular publics (or counter-publics) sharing a common belief that issues in shared actions, words, or rituals. Studies using these ideas analyze the processes of stranger-relationality in crowds of football fans, migrant communities, political activists, and so on (Warner 2002). A similar feeling of community is expressed by some of the participants of the annual water pilgrimage to the Tarakeshwar temple, around 60 km from the city of Kolkata in West Bengal, in the monsoon month of Shravan.

Procession and pilgrimage: The case of Tarakeshwar

Alan Morinis has traced the history of the Tarakeshwar pilgrimage, one of the most popular forms of religious enactment in Bengal (Morinis 1982, 1985). Every Shravan month, thousands of people, largely young men, but

also older men and women of all ages, carry pots of water from the Hooghly River to Tarakeshwar to pour on the stone linga symbolizing the Hindu god Shiva. The streets of Kolkata are filled with groups who organize themselves for this *jal-jatra* (Bengali: 'water pilgrimage'), which can take up to three days to complete. While some groups rent small trucks to take them, most people will walk barefoot, while some, more devout or bound by a vow to the deity, will lie prostrate and shuffle forward on their knees while touching their foreheads to the ground at regular intervals. The pilgrimage is extremely gruelling since the weather is uncomfortably warm, with the chance of heavy rain and thunderstorms. Technically, this is not a procession, though there is a collective aspect to the journey. Unlike many sites of Shakta worship in and around Kolkata, Tarakeshwar is more connected with popular Shaivism, and the temple was built in 1729. Despite its popularity, the pilgrimage is not officially controlled or planned. Individuals choose to participate of their own volition, and they plan their own route, time, and companions. I focus here upon the importance of this pilgrimage in constituting a particular kind of (largely subaltern) urban spirituality in the city of Kolkata since processions of pilgrims to this adjacent sacred shrine are part of a distinctive urban landscape and a way of claiming space on city streets, as well as on the inter-urban route.

The traditional story states that two brothers, Vishnudas and Bharamallah, won the patronage of the nawab of Murshidabad and were sent to collect his taxes and generally keep the peace in the area. A series of miracles led to the building of the temple in 1729. The deity here soon earned a reputation for miraculous cures, especially of chronic ailments of the digestive system, fulfilling of desires, and removal of life obstacles for devout worshippers. While the shrine enjoyed considerable local popularity, it was the film *Baba Taraknath* (1982) that made this pilgrimage widely popular in Bengal. The plot of the film bears little resemblance to the original stories but rather blends several other elements from popular legends and folklore, such as the story of Behula and Lakhinder in the *Manasamangal-kavya*, where the devoted wife implores the god to revive her dead husband after a snakebite. Morinis records the impact of the film with respect to both an increase in pilgrim numbers and the form of the ritual. 'The shrine priests say that traffic to the temple doubled or tripled following the release of the film and has not abated since' (Morinis 1982: 77). Indeed, the *Imperial Gazetteer of 1908* and the *District Gazetteer of 1912* both record only two annual festivals at the temple, and there is no mention of this pilgrimage in the month of Shravan. According to Morinis, the Shravan pilgrimage was started by the priest Satishchandra Giri who, in order to attract Bengal's wealthy Marwari community (of Rajasthani origin), started a pilgrimage in the month that Marwaris regarded as holy (Morinis 1982: 78). Whatever the origins, this month sees not only thousands of people walking the streets but also thousands waiting by the streets to provide water, 'pure' foods (usually this means uncooked food like *muri* or *chire*, puffed or pressed rice, and fruits or *sattvik* vegetarian dishes), as well as first aid for footsore pilgrims.

In order to understand the participants' reasons for choosing to participate in this particular pilgrimage and their relations with space, a discussion was initiated with some of them. The oldest man who was interviewed, Santosh Banik, gave his age as 70 years and said that he owned a small shop. He identified his occupation as 'businessman' and said that he had been going to Tarakeshwar for at least 60 years. His very first visit, he recalls, was when he was a boy, and he saw many people around him making preparations for the pilgrimage. He, too, wanted to join them, but he did not have any money. A neighbour said that he could spare ten rupees and so he joined the group. They first took a bus and walked the rest of the way. He remembers that the roads were very bad at that time, and the entire journey was very arduous. There were no street lights or paved roads, and the uneven path hurt his feet. Pilgrims were frightened. They feared being robbed. Groups would become separated and would hope to meet further down the road. However, with their faith as their sole recourse, people would go on; no one dropped out. 'With His name on our lips and the holy water-pots hanging from our shoulders, we would go forth', he recalls. He claims to have observed only some young and arrogant people not completing the pilgrimage, whereas the old and infirm succeed with their faith. As a young man, he was a newspaper vendor, and could not afford to take a day off. August 15 (Independence Day) being his one holiday, he would go on that day – partly by bus and partly on foot. Gradually, more and more of his neighbours wanted to join the pilgrimage till the numbers reached about a hundred, and it became possible for them to contribute and hire a bus. Also, by then a 'senior', he felt a sense of responsibility for the more recent devotees. Roads had also improved, so they could go further using vehicular transport. Women, too, began to join the group. Preparations in the neighbourhood would start about a month ahead of the date. Everyone would contribute in whatever way they could.

He told us that his father, too, used to go on the pilgrimage for about 10–12 years, and now his son is a regular pilgrim. He strongly believes in the power of the deity to grant boons through his miraculous powers and says that all who visit the temple do so because of their faith in that power. He cites two instances of such miracles. In one, a friend who had been awaiting the results of a job interview was assured by Banik that he would get good news before the date of the pilgrimage; the friend did get the job and joined him for the pilgrimage. In another, a childless man dreamt that he should go on the pilgrimage. There he found a child abandoned near a garbage bin, whom he took home and raised as his own. Santosh Banik also credits his devotion and regular pilgrimages for his own success in life – from being a penniless young man to building a house for himself with TV, air-conditioning, and amenities he could not have dreamt of in his youth. He claims that a photograph of the temple has been displayed in his store for more than 50 years and still looks as fresh as it did when it was new. 'Isn't this also a miracle?' he asks.

Santosh also asserts that on this pilgrimage, everyone is equal – even film stars and famous people who visit during this time have to leave their cars, walk, and stand in line with everyone else. There is no preferential treatment

as one finds in other temples. Everyone offers whatever they can afford—just five rupees worth of sugar-drops, or a big donation to the temple, but there is no distinction in the treatment by the temple priests or others. In fact, he emphasizes the way strangers help one another on this difficult journey, which, he says, has become easier over the years. Earlier, people had to rest by the roadside, and there was practically no provision for food or water. Now there are 'camps' or, as he refers to them, 'chotis' set up by volunteers who provide a resting place, water, food and offer other kinds of help. These improvements he credits to Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal since 2011, who has developed the roads and lights and cleaned up the surroundings. Before, there used to be a huge crowd waiting to pour water in front of the Shiva-linga, and it was difficult for some to approach the sacred centre. Nowadays, there is a water channel that is accessible to all where devotees can pour water, certain it will fall at the right place. While acknowledging the government's role, Banik maintains that it is the god who is responsible for such changes, which shows us how powerful he is. The interview also reveals how Santosh Banik feels about the temporary engagements and interactions that he has with neighbours and strangers during this particular time. He feels responsible for the well-being of others, and he remembers the gesture made by someone he says he did not really know who had taken him on his very first such journey. As this place of worship and devotional practice belongs to popular tradition and is not incorporated into any organized religious association or body, there is a spontaneity of feeling and involvement which seems to stem from his identification with the pilgrims as a community, and responsibilities as an elder of the community. However, unlike most ideas of community, this identity formation is shifting and temporal.

Sushanta Banik, Santosh Banik's son, is 37 years old and identifies himself as a businessman. He began accompanying his father in 1999 when he was 15 or 16 years old. It was something he had eagerly awaited, and he describes it as a wonderful experience. 'It cannot be described. You have to experience it to understand how beautiful the whole experience is'. Nowadays, a car accompanies them when they walk there, though some older people such as his father and others walk as far as they can and then avail of the car while the younger people walk. On the way back, he takes older people back in the car with him. About the changes that he has seen, Sushanta says that the number of pilgrims in his own group has declined in recent years, as people are busy with their jobs and cannot take time to prepare, walk, and recuperate. However, the total number of pilgrims to the shrine has considerably increased over the years. Nowadays, 'non-Bengalis' also participate in large numbers, whereas previously it was only the Bengali-speaking population that went on this particular pilgrimage. Sushanta also commented on the growth in the number of camps which provide food, drinking water, and other support. These are nowadays found every 500 metres on the road. According to him, most of the helpers come from Kolkata to serve the pilgrims. Many people eat, drink, and rest in these camps. He and his father, however, do not. The son also believes in the deity's power to accomplish

miracles and that it is this shared faith that makes the whole pilgrimage so memorable. However, unlike his father, Sushanta says that nowadays, a lot of young people just undertake the pilgrimage to have fun. These groups get drunk and boisterous. Often, they bother other people around them. The main change for the better that Sushanta has seen is in the quality of roads and other amenities. 'Previously, our eyes would fill with tears, as our feet would hurt intensely as we walked barefoot along rough roads for more than 20 kilometres. Now the roads are so smooth that walking has become very easy', he says.

The phenomenon of the 'camp' is something that has developed over the last 15 years, says Biren Khanra, one of the weekend volunteers at a camp organized during this period by Dashadvarin Byayam Samiti, a traditional physical exercise society in the Lake Town area of Kolkata. According to him, almost a hundred people, men and women, prepare food, donate money, and spend two days here providing water with sweets and vegetarian cooked food like *luchi* (fried bread) and a light curry of potatoes and pumpkin. Hundreds of people drink water, eat, or just sit down and rest during these two days. For him, there is a sense of satisfaction born out of the feeling that he is serving the devotees and helping them, especially by providing first aid to those who have developed painful blisters or other injuries and aches from their long walk. Though their location, assigned by the local panchayat, varies from year to year, many people make it a point to stop at their particular camp, as a bond has developed over the years. Many of them call and chat occasionally. He says that they appreciate the support that they get, and therefore, a warm relationship exists between the members of the camp and the regular pilgrims. The presence of so many camps creates a festive atmosphere along the route, added to by the number of people. However, he speaks even more warmly of his team of volunteers who work so tirelessly for others before and during those two days. 'It is as if we are one big family of more than a hundred people. There are women and youngsters too in our group and for those days at least we are a family', he says.

Debashish Halder, from Govindapur Bustee in the south of Kolkata, also describes the increase in the number of camps as a recent phenomenon. Previously, he says, there were only 'non-Bengali' camps, but now the Bengali camps far outnumber the original 'Marwari' camps as he calls them. (The confusion about the participation of 'non-Bengalis' was difficult to resolve on the basis of evidence.) Debashish began going on the pilgrimage in 1991 when he was very young, inspired by the older pilgrims he saw. The journey was very difficult, and when he returned home, he thought he would never go again, as it was so painful and arduous. But he changed his mind when the time of the pilgrimage came around the next year, becoming a regular. It became an important part of his life, and he began to persuade younger people to go along. However, as his social and work-related responsibilities grew, he had to drop out and felt very bad about that. 'As a self-employed person, I cannot take the time off from my business [he supplies bottled water to homes and establishments] and then one needs at least two days to

recuperate', he says. However, one year he noticed a group of seniors from his neighbourhood preparing to set up a camp. He joined them in 2012 and has been a regular since. They are an informal group of volunteers who collect money from donors all year round – monthly or quarterly as people prefer – and even accept goods such as cooking oil or rice or other ingredients, whatever one can afford. 'We are all just small entrepreneurs', he says. 'We plan and prepare, hire vehicles to carry everything, book a space and then set out. We stay there for two days, cooking simple food like *khichri* with lentils and rice, *alu dum* (potato curry), making sherbet, and taking care of the pilgrims. Some need medicines for their feet, some have aches all over their bodies, so we provide medicines and massage. Many of their faces become familiar to us and we exchange greetings. However, we are all too busy and tired to talk much'.

Debashish says, 'It gives me a great sense of satisfaction that I am helping these people on such a difficult journey. That sense of satisfaction is why I contribute as much water as I can. Previously I could only offer a few bottles, but now that I am doing well in my business, I can afford to contribute much more. I feel that often we spend money on useless things, so I am happy to contribute something for other people, to help them. It gives a feeling of peace to help people who have such devotion. I feel I am doing something good'. He continues, 'Unfortunately, nowadays, we find some young men undertaking the pilgrimage not out of devotion, but just as a jaunt. For them it is spending time with their friends. When they are tired, they just hop on a bus. They lack the dedication and devotion to accept the pain and effort. They often drink and create a loud and disruptive atmosphere. We are not interested in serving them. We can tell the real devotees from their demeanour and attitude. Most people above 30 are sincere devotees, but many of the younger men are a nuisance', he says. While all the members of the camp are from his locality, he says that they do not socialize otherwise. It is only for the few days of preparation and actual work that they all come together for a greater cause and feel close to each other.

The Jain Sawari: An urban ritual procession

The involvement of non-participants, the audience which is drawn into the collective spirit of the pilgrimage, has thus an important role in the performance itself. This is elaborated by Arpit Shah, one of the organizers of the Sawari procession of the Jain community in Kolkata (Shah 2015). On his blog, Arpit narrates the history of this procession along Chitpur Road in North Kolkata on the day of Kartik *purnimā* (October–November). His narrative has the familiar elements of the discovery of an idol, prophecies, instructions communicated in dreams and the devoted disciple. However, the pomp and magnificence of this urban procession are in direct contrast to the subaltern, everyday character of the Tarakeshwar pilgrimage, although it commemorates the resumption of the practice of wandering undertaken by Jain monks who renounce the world, not spending more than one night

under the same roof and eating whatever alms they are given. During the monsoon months (*chaturmas*), they stay on temple premises, and the Kartik full moon day marks their departure from their temporary shelter. In Kolkata, this commemoration was started relatively late. Though Jains, who traditionally provided the finances for merchants and rulers, are found in Bengal from the sixteenth century, they were mostly clustered around Murshidabad, which was then the seat of the nawabs, shifting to Kolkata after the city became the financial and commercial centre of the East India Company.

According to Arpit Shah, the Jain sawari in Kolkata dates from 1813 but acquired its present magnificence through the devotion of a very rich and powerful Jain jeweller, Ray Bahadur Badridas Mookim, who built the ornate Pareshnath Temple, inaugurated in 1867, to reflect the community's wealth.[2] There were already at least three Jain temples in Kolkata, but this is the grandest and most decorative. In keeping with his wealth and social standing, he commissioned a solid silver palanquin and precious silver jewellery for the idol of Shri Dharmadas Bhagwan, the 15th Jain Tirthankara. At the head of the procession is the Indradhwaj or flagpole, which adds one flag each year, now totalling 206. In the interview, Shah says,

> When the procession comes out, people from outside [i.e. non-Jains] come and gather in lines on both sides of the road. It is not a mere 20 to 50 odd people, but very large numbers who stand in lines. The entire road becomes full. On either side of Beadon Street one can see people standing or sitting, eagerly waiting for the sawari to come, and to get the 'darshan' of the saint.

One notable feature of this procession is that the Marwari Jains dress in a unique style.

> They come to the procession dressed in the 'Sheherwali' [from 'sheher', city] attire dating from when the Marwaris were in Murshidabad. This dress, featuring a small hat, a Bengali style dhoti, and Kurta, was the traditional attire of the 'Sheherwali' (urbanized) Marwari business elite.

This costume, a combination of Bengali styles and the traditional clothing of Marwari Jains, was worn on the days of the procession to display their adaptation to Bengali couture and culture.

Two conventions or traditions are of particular interest here. One is that all devotees go through a bidding process before the day of the procession to determine who will carry the palanquin, who will perform the first ritual, and so on, with the highest bidder obtaining the honour of first touching the palanquin. Another interesting fact is that the height of the Indradhwaj requires the temporary cutting of the overhead electrical lines for trams running along Chitpur Road. The colonial British administration had objected to this, forbidding the flagpole's inclusion in the procession. However, the Jain community challenged this ban legally, arguing that the flags could not be lowered on religious grounds, and the court ruled in their favour, forcing the

British and later the Indian state government to bear the costs of the whole operation of cutting and reconnecting the lines. For some years now, the state government has refused to pay, and the community bears the entire expense.

This procession is designed as a performance at many levels. The ornate and dazzling nature of the display of jewellery and wealth, whether for the British or the local population, the bidding process displaying both wealth and devotion, and the carefully selected dress code of the elders all combine to send out particular messages to both the 'audience' members who are characterized by Shah as 'outsiders' and the community members. The custom of cutting the tram lines and wrangling about who will pay for this also raises interesting questions regarding the state and its secular nature. What is the state's responsibility in ensuring the community's religious demands, especially when community rituals inconvenience other citizens who may not be part of them? How does the state weigh these alternative claims to public space? During the many pujas in the Hindu calendar, *pandāls*, temporary structures of bamboo, cloth, and other materials, are constructed not only in public spaces, such as parks, but also on the road itself, often blocking pedestrian and vehicular traffic. While police permission is mandatory for building such structures (which may inconvenience residents), the police usually do grant permission to requests from puja committees. In most cases, the citizen's basic rights are sacrificed to the right to practise religion. Often, in Kolkata, these large, elaborate constructions are also ways of performing power in public since these pujas are associated with political leaders and majority religion. Not only are pomp and grandeur on display but also the unspoken messages that represent relative claims and the power to actualize these claims of individuals, groups, communities, or religions seem to be important constituents of these kinds of performances. The Jain sawari involves a small, but very rich, community and a unique annual occasion. Habermas, following earlier theorists, seems to accept the view that one of the features of religion and religious practice in modern societies was its private nature. However, what we find in these various examples of the civic performance of religion is public display and claims on public space.

Other processions: Minority faith and state patronage

L. N. Bhutia, a member of the managing committee of a monastery and Buddha temple in South Kolkata, told us that their temple organizes a procession as part of the festival that commemorates 'World Peace Day', the first day of the Buddha's teaching of his philosophy, to promote peace and harmony in the world. Many Hindus also join the procession, which is open to all. Buddhists from all over the city come, each carrying a page of holy scriptures or colourful flags. The procession is silent; there is no chanting, though monks play wind instruments or cymbals that are part of the prayer rituals. However, this procession is granted police permission only on a Sunday. Perhaps this injunction is due to the fact that Buddhists are a very small community in Kolkata and do not have the political power to negotiate the route or the day of their procession.

This is in direct contrast to the elaborate and efficient management that the Kolkata Police exhibits during the five-day Durga Puja celebrated by the Hindu majority and the Muharram procession of the minority Muslim Shia community. On the tenth day of the month of Muharram, known as Ashura, Imam Hussain Bin Ali, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, was killed along with most of his followers in the battle of Karbala. This day is commemorated as a day of remembrance, mourning, and penance by the Shia Muslim community through a procession in which most of the men, dressed in black, the colour of mourning, carry black and green flags and rectangular boxes representing the coffins of the martyrs of Karbala. Young men, carrying swords, may stage mock battles, and many also use chains or whips or knives for the ritual self-flagellation that is part of the mourning and penance of the followers. Huge drums reproduce the sounds of the war drums of the time, as men walk with blood streaming from their bodies and cry 'Ha Hussain! Ha Hassan!' in memory of the two grandsons of Muhammad. Many people line the streets to watch this spectacle, acting out communal grief through extravagant gestures and rituals.

Debaditya Ganguly, a long-time Hindu resident of the Prince Anwar Shah Road area in Tollygunj, has been a spectator of Muharram processions here for more than 40 years. Now in his mid-50s, he recalls how this procession with its grim drum beats, the young men bleeding and weeping, the colourful large triangular flags, and charged atmosphere inspired a deep interest, as well as respect in the local community, in both Hindus and Muslims. His first recollection is that on the two days before the actual day of the procession, he would be told to come back home from school by 6 p.m., as the roads would be closed to all traffic because of the rehearsals prior to the performance itself. He would often get off the tram early just to observe the rehearsals. All residents knew about the road closures and adjusted their schedules accordingly. Muharram itself is a state holiday, so most people would just stay at home, but he emphasized that he had never heard anyone complain about such inconveniences. He commented on rising levels of intolerance and impatience in India today. Ganguly remembers that in earlier days, many poor people from the villages in South 24 Parganas would flock in and were offered full meals all along the route of the procession. This too was a remarkable sight since the people who came were very poor, many of them disabled, and without access to adequate food. These acts of charity have declined over the years. In fact, this year during my visit to the site, I found a fairground atmosphere on the pavement, with colourfully dressed onlookers, temporary stalls for spicy snacks, and vendors selling plastic toys.

However, as Annu Jalais points out, there is a strong identity formation connected with participating in the procession that goes beyond Shia religious practices. She observes that 'what is noteworthy is that all over the Indic world, as well as in diverse places inhabited by South Asian Muslims, Sunnis also commemorate Muharram with what have traditionally been regarded as Shi'a practices' (Jalais 2014: 71). She cites the explanation offered by the caretaker of the Shia Imambara at Metiabruz,

> Ours is a different kind of procession – it is one of mourning where we sing soulful songs and where some of the younger ones beat themselves up with chains. The Sunnis who come with their tazias and join our procession are of a totally different kind; they believe that the making of a tazia is a form of piety and that their craftsmanship and ability to make such beautiful works of art are due to divine blessing. Ours is a procession of mourning; theirs one of fervent veneration.
>
> (Jalais 2014: 76)

In her essay, Jalais discusses the major role of Sunni Biharis in the Muharram processions in Kolkata and Dhaka, detailing the local beliefs and stories that lie behind this community's enthusiastic participation. Large numbers of Bihari Muslims, originally migrant labourers, tailors, or skilled artisans, have also been settled in the Tollygunj area for three or four generations. Many now identify as Bengalis and share in the local festivals and commemorative practices. Such communities, judging by language and clothing, were represented in the Muharram crowds I observed in Tollygunj. A more nuanced discussion of this particular event would show the coming together of a number of identities – Shia, Sunni, Bengali-speaking, Urdu-speaking, Hindi-speaking Muslims – while the 'purist' camp of Sunnis disapproves of such performative rituals and spectacles, contrary to reformed Wahabi Islam. The magnetic appeal of the Ashura procession in Kolkata and Dhaka, its capacity to draw participants across communities, is connected to the power of urban spectacles and the nature of religious performance in itself. In Kashmir's Srinagar, once a Shia majority city, the banning of Muharram processions reveals deep Sunni-Shia schisms, but that is a different story (Ashiq 2020). Kolkata, despite its Sunni majority, has never witnessed violence at the Muharram processions, which are traditionally supported by the civic administration, the police, and the local population. In fact, when the present state government reduced the number of alcohol-free, 'dry' days from 12 to four-and-a-half, one day that remained 'dry' was Muharram, indicating the respect it continues to command (Chatterjee 2016).

Cities such as Kolkata have remained connected with global economic structures from colonialism to globalization but also retained elements of what some may define as a pre-modern ethos. However, it is perhaps more fruitful to see Kolkata as a famously porous city where processions create channels for more than just religiosity. Identity construction, community formation, group distinctions, and urban sociabilities are the more important elements of the performative category that is religion in the Asian megacity.

Notes

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2 This account blends material from his website and from a personal interview.

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11 Memory and space

Street shrines and popular devotion in Amritsar

Yogesh Snehi

In this chapter, I explore popular Sufi shrine practices and associated semiotics in the city of Amritsar, in Indian Punjab, to make sense of debates on religion in South Asia. Instead of 'sedimentary' theories of religious change (see Eaton 2002: 2; Larson 1995: 53), I argue for 'popular' religion as overlapping layers of religious practices delineating the lived and the everyday, thus spatializing faith practices in modern South Asia. The historiography of religion in Punjab has predominantly focused on the polemics surrounding the Gurdwara Reform movement and the primacy of 'Sikh' religious institutions (Murphy 2012; Tan 1995), defined by a colonial theology proposing fixed, impenetrable religious boundaries. Amritsar is thus principally associated with the Golden Temple (popularly called Darbar Sahib) as a major centre for 'Sikh' veneration and, more recently, the Durgiana Temple as a sacred site (*tīrath* in Punjabi) for urban 'Hindus'. While the Golden Temple dates from Mughal India, the Durgiana Temple resulted from religious reform movements, and debates on religious territorialization, in the early twentieth century. However, Amritsar is also dotted with unique street shrines that defy easy classification as 'Hindu', 'Sikh', or 'Muslim'. These shrines are a blend of pre-Partition and contemporary shrine practices. Several Sufi mystics are memorialized in Amritsar each year through *urs* celebrations of Sakhi Sarwar (Baba Lakhdata), Baba Farid, Khwaja Khizr (Jhule Lal), Sabir Pak, Gauz Pak, and local *pīrs* that transform the city streets, engaging people from diverse castes, classes, and religious groups. Contrary to communal stereotypes, such practices continue to define the contours of sacred space in urban India.

Much of the fieldwork utilized here was part of a decade-long project on popular Sufi shrines in post-Partition Punjab (see Snehi 2019)[1]; a major part was carried out during 2006–2011 when I taught at a college located within the walled city of Amritsar. To me, as to most others, Amritsar was a city singularly identified as a centre of 'Sikh' veneration. But understanding the city through such 'unifocal' lenses seemed impossible. Looking for theoretical models that could explain the 'uncanny' and fluid aspects of the sacred in the city space, I began to explore continuities and changes at shrines in Amritsar. This chapter is an attempt to map space, memory, and belonging in the city both before Partition, when it was predominantly Muslim, and after.

The street shrines I examine are located within the largely non-Muslim walled city, and my research involved documenting and decoding locations, neighbourhoods, festivals, rituals, and iconographies of popular saints venerated there. The following discussion is not an attempt to disentangle but rather understand histories of faith practices that are entangled and 'hybrid', using Bruno Latour's notion of the social (Latour 1993).

A city in a nationalist historiography

Established by Guru Ramdas (d. 1581), Amritsar owes its name to a sacred tank (*amrit sar*, 'pool of nectar') in the middle of which was laid the foundation of the holiest of 'Sikh' religious shrines by Miyan Mir, a Qadiri Sufi mystic of Lahore, in 1588. 'Sikh' historiography acknowledges the role of Sufi mysticism in the Sikh tradition through the inclusion of the Punjabi Sufi saint Baba Farid's mystical poetry in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred book of the Sikh faith, but goes no further (see Singh and Gaur 2009: 31–34).[2] Peripheral to contemporary 'Sikh' tradition, Baba Farid is vibrantly present in popular commemorative practices and the intimate relationship between 'Sikh' gurus and Sufi saints continues to resonate in popular memory after Partition (Bigelow 2012; see Purewal 2011 for the Rababi legacy of Bhai Chand).

This peripheralization of 'non-Sikh' history is etched into the turbulent period of the 1940s when *sajjādā nishīns* (hereditary caretakers) of many important Sufi shrines of Punjab began shifting their political allegiance from the British to the Muslim League and paved the way for the Partition of the province (Ahmed 2013; Gilmartin 1989). In the early twentieth century, when reformers had begun targeting shared sacred sites, Sufi saint veneration and visiting of shrines were not only attacked as un-Islamic but also as contrary to the textual tenets of *Sikhi* (for instance, in Giani Dit Singh's tract *Gugga Gapora Te Sultan Puara*, 1976). Debates over shrines were significant in reform movements as in South Asian politics (on the Shahidganj Mosque, see Kamran 2013). New ways of viewing religious practices, of defining the 'self' and the 'other', characterized the elite intellectual polemics of public spaces (see Grewal 1999, Jones 1973, for analyses of a Singh Sabha pamphlet 'Hum Hindu Nahin'). These elite claims and conflicts redefined the terms of engagement in the public sphere (Van der Veer 2001: 14–29); almost a century later, they continue to define the tropes of contemporary historiography.

The Gurdwara Reform movement dominates accounts of twentieth-century Amritsar (Singh 1922; Singh 1978; Murphy 2012). In the early 1920s the non-violent Akali demand for management of gurdwaras by a reformist 'Sikh' faction, Tat Khalsa, evoked a strong nationalist response.[3] Gandhi extended Congress's support, drawing the agitation into the anti-colonial non-cooperation movement. This nationalist appropriation of a religious movement is etched into post-Partition historiography. In spatial terms, the Golden Temple and Jallianwalla Bagh, site of the 1919 massacre of unarmed civilians by British troops, are key elements in a nationalist imagining of the

urban landscape of Amritsar (Collett 2006; Datta and Settar 2000; Tuteja 1997; Horniman 1920; for urban history, see Datta 1967; Gauba 1988; Singh 2000). Talbot and Tatla's *Epicentre of Violence* (2006), captures the city in the midst of Partition violence and opens up a rare archive of memories of the city and religious communities before Partition. Through a reading of select narratives, I will attempt to problematize ahistorical presuppositions about religious identities and cultural flows and to examine change, continuity, and memory in contemporary urban spaces.

Contextualizing lived spaces

Scholarly readings of sacred shrines in South Asia have predominantly focused on the ritual practices of major religious sites rather than the space within which they are embedded. This obsessive focus on tropes of structure, symbolism, and political economy overlooks the significant historical roles of space and the everyday, which are all the more crucial in the case of popular or street shrines that lack any significant documentation of their establishment and evolution. In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues,

> Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short, every social space has a history.
>
> (Lefebvre 1991: 110)

For Lefebvre, the dialectics of space are constituted by spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space). These provide useful tools for thinking about how space is experienced (Knott 2008: 11). Michel de Certeau further argues, that 'spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life', and therefore, sociological understanding depends on a 'theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city' (Certeau 1988: 96). Treating the history of a particular space 'as such', Lefebvre suggests, makes 'the relationship of that space to the time which gave rise to it take[s] on an aspect that differs sharply from the picture generally accepted by historians', as in pre- and post-Partition Amritsar. 'The uncertain traces left by events are not the only marks on (or in) space: society in its actuality also deposits its script, the result and product of social activities' (Lefebvre 1991: 110).

Thus, popular shrines are a kind of 'bridge of [historical] understanding' (Chakrabarty 2000: 109; Humboldt 1985: 112), which contemporizes pasts as a 'living memory' and 'carries within itself both survivals from previous eras and the possibility for further change' (Moran 2004: 56). Popular shrines offer an opportunity to explore everyday religion through what Certeau terms 'procedures of consumption' – the 'use made by the "common people"

of the culture disseminated and imposed by the "elites" producing the language'. 'These "ways of operating" constitute the innumerable practices through which users reappropriate "the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production"' (Certeau 1988: xiii–xiv). Significantly, the 'everyday' is absent both from the annals of the archives and the 'spectacularizing discourse of modernity' (Moran 2004: 54). Moran sees it as a residual, overlooked material which is repetitive, peripheral, uncanny, and uneventful and, hence, invisible (Moran 2005: 26–27). He thus makes a case for the 'everyday' by foregrounding Gramsci's 'spontaneous philosophy' (1971: 323): 'forms of lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts, conceal resilient power relationships'. The 'everyday' interrelates practice and representation, quotidian reality with 'clichés, mythologies, stereotypes and unsourced quotations' (Moran 2005: 12). Popular shrines can thus be studied not just as 'timeless and pristine objects', but also as 'products of the restless operation of both internal dynamics…and external forces…over time' (Ortner 2006: 9). It is in the 'culturally organized practices' of everyday life and memory that the dialectics of social life can be understood, especially in 'commemorative ceremonies' (Connerton 1989: 338).

Reading sacred practices through street shrines thus disrupts the accepted nationalist and communal narrative and provides an alternative imagination of social space in post-Partition Amritsar, one that might narrate the survival of pre-Partition memory. In their study of Methodists, Brace, Bailey, and Harvey argue that 'spatialities of religion can help us to understand its [sacred] histories' (2006: 31), urging the need to move beyond the spaces of church or chapel and focus 'on the everyday, and often banal, formal and informal practices', from 'education, charities and autodidactic cultures, to the organization of sports and social events' (32–33). In a similar vein, we should look at informal practices of popular Sufi shrines to understand their multiple points of contact with social space: thus the practice of *dangal* (wrestling) competition during *urs* significantly blurs the distinction between sacred and profane. Spaces may be read, therefore, not only as *sacred or profane* but also as the 'reflections and reproductions of religious and social desires and anxieties' (Brace et al. 2006: 30). Eliade's (1959) problematic constitution of sacred space as *axis mundi*, a hierophantic manifestation of the 'real', separated from 'profane' space would now appear myopic and untenable.

As Knott argues, space is also 'dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history and time, its condition of simultaneity and the various ways in which it is experienced and represented'. Spatial theory acknowledges the 'intersection' of space and time, 'particularly in the context of globalization', and this is important 'for the study of religion with its characteristic focus on history, tradition and change'. Space is not a 'passive container or backdrop for human activity' (Knott 2008: 12–15). Street shrines of Amritsar present a dissenting form of sacred practice located between two major shrines, the Golden Temple and Durgiana Temple, entrenched in the political discourses of Tat Khalsa and 'reformed' Hinduisms since the 1920s. Not only do street

shrines extend the study of religion to spaces outside institutional structures, but *urs* (death anniversary) and *ziārat* (pilgrimage) are occasions where boundaries between participants and observers are blurred. This blurring and overlapping are the everyday corrective to linear historical discourses, as well as to the supposed dominance of major religious sites like the Golden Temple.

Demography, history, memory

Nineteenth-century demographic data indicates that Amritsar was largely a 'Muslim'-dominated town, with Muslims inhabiting the outer edges of the walled city and 'Hindus' and 'Sikhs' dominating the inner zones (*katrās*). Muslims in 1852 comprised about 49 per cent of the total population of the city, 9 per cent more than in the whole district. The Sikhs constituted 15.05 per cent of the total population of the city in 1941 (Gauba 1988: 262). Anand Gauba observes,

> Their [Muslim] number can be safely estimated at more than 40,000…. Thus one could find Muslim traders and shopkeepers in the heart of the old city like Bazar Sheikhan adjoining Guru Bazar. The Muslim priestly class had also their residential localities in old Amritsar: *Kucha* Qazian, *Kucha* Ragian and Rababian who sang and played celestial music were such examples. But Muslims in general had mostly settled in the outermost quarters of the city, close to the wall like *katras* Khazana, Hakiman, Karan Singh, Garbha Singh.
>
> (1988: 25–26)

Historically, the land on which the city emerged was owned by a mixed community of 'Muslim' Syeds, Sheikhs, and Rajputs. The tomb of Syed Fateh Ali Shah, one of the former 'owners' of the site, is located outside the fort of Govindgarh to the west. The site of the Golden Temple was first purchased by the fourth Sikh guru, Ram Das. It was marked by a small natural 'pool of water', which was said to have been a favourite resort of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. Guru Ram Das erected a hut on the margin of this pool and obtained a grant of the site, together with 500 *bīghās* of land from the Emperor Akbar in 1577, paying Rs. 700 *akbarī tankās* to the *zamīndārs* of village Tung, who owned the land (*Gazetteer 1892–93*, 1991: 149). Guru Arjan founded the Golden Temple in 1588, and the city grew on its periphery, expanding during the time of Ranjit Singh, who built the wall around it (Singh 2000: 117–124). Apart from two important mosques located in the bazaar, 'Muslim' religious places mainly lay outside the walled city. The *Jami Masjid* was outside the Rambagh Gate, and several *takiās* like those of Pir Shah, Bahar Shah, Noor Shah, Jane Shah, and Miraj-ud-din were located outside the city wall. [4] Some of the *takiās* also had *khānqahs* attached to them (Gauba 1988: 16).[5] Before Partition, the principal 'Muslim' gathering is said to have been at Kotli Shah Habib, the shrine of the saint near Ramdas in the

Ajnala Tahsil. Following Partition, at least until the 1970s, no such gathering was held, nor was a fair held at the shrine of any other 'Muslim' saint in the district (*Punjab District Gazetteer* 1976: 93). But gradually, fairs dedicated to saints, such as Baba Sher Shah Wali at Gharyala (Patti), Baba Bakhar Ali Shah at Khutril Kalan (Ajnala), and Takiya Baba Rodey Shah at Chung (Patti), re-established themselves.

One should, therefore, be wary of representing the religious identities of medieval saints and their shrines as exclusive and impenetrable domains. Sufi shrines particularly defied these exclusivities, though the *sajjādā nishīns* of several major Sufi shrines were prominent in the 1940s pro-Partition movement and demand for Pakistan (see Gilmartin 1989). It is thus an intriguing question how ritual practices at these popular Sufi shrines were reinstated: what cultural flows existed between communities and faith practices before Partition and in contemporary Amritsar? The Census of 1941 records 657,695 Muslims residing in the district; post-Partition, in 1951, the number declined to just 4,585.[6] The district accommodated only 332,260 refugees, leaving a gap of 320,850. This gap was further widened to 421,093 given the loss of an estimated 100,243 Muslims from 186 villages of the Patti subdivision which was transferred to the Amritsar Division in 1947. Newcomers resettling in the district were far fewer in number than the outgoing Punjabi Muslims; in the census of 1961, the number of Muslims in the district was 2,401 (2,125 males and 276 females: *Punjab District Gazetteer* 1976: 120). Post-Partition historiography does not attest to any significant presence of Muslims or Islamicate influence in the lives of people of the walled city before 1947. Among the interviews edited by Talbot and Tatla (2006) of prominent non-'Muslim' Punjabis of Amritsar post-Partition, none talks about earlier cultural flows between 'Muslim', 'Hindu', and 'Sikh' inhabitants of the city. Reform historiography lays emphasis on the Arya Samaji critique of Islam, Christianity, Sanatan Dharma, and Sikhism leading to the rise of Hindu consciousness in late nineteenth-century Punjab (see Jones 1976). Vaid Vidya Sagar, a prominent Arya Samaji, who lived in Amritsar since 1922, reports cordial relations between 'Hindus', 'Sikhs', and 'Muslims' in Amritsar before 1947:

> Karmpura, Faizpura, [Hussainpura]…had almost 80 per cent Muslims and there used to be very cordial relations between us. The Muslims were mostly workers, construction worker, or engaged in other kinds of labour. But they all lived well with each other.
>
> (Talbot and Tatla 2006: 213)

But he does not recall occasions when communities came together:

> There was no such occasion. Sometimes, Hindus and Sikhs would get together, but not with Muslims. Usually, the Muslims would not mix with the Hindus. Actually, it started with a massacre in the walled city. You see, most Sikhs and Hindus were settled in the walled city, while Muslims

generally lived in the outer area. So it happened that we could not move out of our part of the city, while they could not get into our part. So, the difficulties started. All our business was inside the walled city, while Muslims lived in such areas as Karmpura, Faizpura, etc.

(Talbot and Tatla 2006: 214–215)

The narratives around this period either deny the possibility of cultural flows or completely omit it. One may therefore ask whether there existed possibilities of popular convergence around religious traditions, even while the city was charged with rising tides of social and religious reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. My surveys suggest that many shrines that were earlier under the control of 'Muslim' caretakers remained desolate for almost a decade post-Partition, at least until 1964, the year the Central Wakf Council was established. However, a significant number of popular Sufi saint shrines always had non-Muslim caretakers, even before Partition (Snehi 2017).

Even when taken over by a new set of caretakers, restoration of ritual practices took a long time. Many of these sacred spaces – mosques, *dargahs*, *khanqahs*, *takiyas*, or graveyards – remained desolate, encroached upon, or put to alternative use. But *dargahs*, *khanqahs*, and *takiyas* associated with major Sufi mystics or local saints of Punjab had their ritual practices restored or were gradually rejuvenated through the agency of individuals or local communities through a long-drawn-out process requiring absorption of the shrines into a transformed demographic and patronage milieu. In one such shrine of *Pañj Pīrs* at Abohar in Punjab, where a large fair is now held annually, ritual practice was reinstated after a decade by Ghela Ram Kamboj and *langar* instituted by his son Bool Chand (see Snehi 2009).

In Amritsar, *urs* at one of the oldest shrines, that of Syed Fateh Ali Shah situated outside the walled city of Amritsar, was started in the year 2004, more than five decades after the Partition of the province. Since some of these shrines were major centres of veneration in the pre-Partition milieu, they held affective links for refugees from the west. But in the case of Haji Rattan's shrine in Bathinda, for instance, Partition ended the *dargāh's* relationship with Naths, who used to attend Baba Rattan's *urs* and participated in the wrestling tournaments (*kushti*) (Bouillier and Khan 2009: 568). But smaller street shrines dedicated to popular Sufi mystics, sometimes located inside the walled city, resonated the continuity of pre-Partition cultural flows, shown by the commencement of *urs* celebrations, a common feature of Chishti, Qadiri, and Suhrawardi shrines, particularly associated with *samā* and *qawwālī*.[7] Since the saint or *pīr's* tomb is present on earth, he is accessible to ordinary believers. Also,

because the *pīr* has achieved his 'urs (union with his beloved, the ultimate goal of Sufi Gnostic experience), he is in far closer communion with Allah than a living person could ever hope to be. Hence his capacity to act as an intercessor.

(Ballard 2006: 164)

Contemporary Amritsar is particularly known for the veneration of popular saints like Baba Lakhdata (Lalanwala Pir Nigaha), Gugga Pir (also popular as Zahir Pir), Gauz Pak (Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani), and Khwaja Khizr (locally venerated as Jhule Lal).

Spatializing Khwaja Khizr (Jhule Lal)

Khwaja Khizr or Khidr has complex histories associated with the religious traditions of the Middle East and South Asia, traversing trade and trans-regional religious networks (see Wolper 2011). As a giver of waters of immortality, Khizr is also known as Jinda or Zinda Pir (one who never dies), a title which is, however, more often used for Gugga (Rose 1911: 562). In many parts of India, Khwaja Khizr is identified with a river god or spirit of wells and streams, revered both by Hindus and Muslims. Synonymously identified with the river Indus, he is seen as an old man clothed in green whose principal shrine is on an island of the river near Bakhar (Burton 1877: 226; see also Bhatia 2007). Folk evidence attests to the relationship of Khwaja Khizr with wells, as detailed by Crooke who describes the digging of wells in Punjab as 'a duty requiring infinite care and caution'. Bowls of water are used to determine the best site, and once the well is dug, the central clod of earth is removed last: 'in the Punjab [they] call it Khwajaji, perhaps after Khwaja Khizr, the water god, worship it and feed Brahmans' (Crooke 1896: 48–49).

Punjab's transformation from agro-pastoralism to settled agriculture is attributed to the role played by well irrigation and Persian wheels (see Habib 2005; Singh 2005). The core areas which experienced this transformation also provided fertile ground for the rise of Sikhism. It is interesting to note that several Sikh gurus invested in the digging of wells for both ritual and irrigation purposes. Some of the early Sikh gurdwaras from the sixteenth century were also associated with water bodies – Golden Temple at Amritsar (pool of nectar), Baoli Sahib (step well) at Goindwal, and Chehereta Sahib (well with six Persian wheels near Amritsar). Fish survive as an important marker of Khwaja Khizr/Varun *devta* in water bodies in gurdwaras of Punjab. Their ubiquitous presence is a reminder of the significant presence of the cult in the period before the rise of 'Sikh' practices. Further, most water bodies, ponds as well as stepwells, associated with significant gurdwaras are also believed to cure skin diseases, particularly leprosy. Ritual bathing, popularly associated with these water bodies, appears an adaptation of earlier religious practices linking bathing with healing and immortality.

Several localities in the walled city of Amritsar are named after wells (*khu*), such as Khu Kuhadian, Bombay wala Khu, Khu Suniarian, Chatti Khu. Major shrines dedicated to the saint Khawja Khizr or Jhule Lal are located on/near water sources, primarily the surviving wells of the city. An estimate from 1892 to 1893 says that the drinking water in Amritsar was entirely obtained from around 1,400 wells, most of which are no longer extant (*Gazetteer 1892–93* 1991: 148). Well water continues to define an essential everyday ritual practice among Namdharis. Their memorial near Ram Bagh in Amritsar attaches special significance to the well located on its premises.

The ubiquitous presence of Jhule Lal in Amritsar problematizes the belief that Jhule Lal is a patron saint of the Sindhis, who are not prominent in Punjab. Dominique-Sila Khan suggests that he is linked to the Sindhi sense of 'otherness' and distinct cultural heritage within the Indian state: 'the saint and deity Jhulelal, also known as Khwaja Khizr, has become a new marker of their identity' (Khan 2008: 72). But in Amritsar, Jhule Lal has a long historical association and is recognized as a hybrid figure, known as Darya Nath or Darya Shah, as well as Khwaja Khizr.

G. W. Briggs noted, 'Jhulelal/Darya Nath's sect is listed among one of the oldest orders of the Kanphata Jogis' (Briggs 1938: 65; c.f. Khan 2008: 76). Khan also notes the dual personality of the 'liminal' tradition:

> In the Nath tradition Darya Nath's dual personality is also noted, as he appears as Darya Shah or Khwaja Khizr. Islamic elements, however, seem to be prevalent in the tradition. Jhulelal's *samadhi* is, in fact, a Muslim tomb, and his so-called 'Hindu' shrine contains no image. The custom of *chaliha* (forty days' fast and austerities connected with the saint's tradition) is also strongly suggestive of the Sufi *chilla*.
>
> (Khan 2008: 76)

The Darya Panth, popular in Sind from the tenth century, should not be associated with much later movements like those started by Nur-ud-din Rishi (fourteenth century), Kabir (fifteenth century), Nanak, or Dadu (both sixteenth century). In the specific context of contemporary Amritsar, urban, mercantile Punjabi Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs play a significant role in the veneration of Jhule Lal. Khwaja Khizr was the patron saint of the *bhishtis* (water carriers) of the river Indus and its tributaries, protector of boatmen, fishermen, mariners and travellers, and god of water (Rose 1911: 170–171). Iconographically, Khwaja Khizr is represented as an aged man, having the aspect of a *faqīr*, clothed entirely in green, and moving in waters with a fish as his vehicle (Coomaraswamy 1989: 157). In Amritsar, his sacred shrines are situated at Katra Sher Singh, where it is managed by Rajkumar (Figures 11.1 and 11.2), and at Khu Kaudiyan, where his shrine is situated along with the popular iconography of the 'family of Shiva', and Gugga Pir. Gugga worship is another significant aspect of saint veneration spread across the entire north Indian plains; a major fair, Chapar Mela, is organized annually in February at Ludhiana. The significant part of this veneration is the idiom of *pir* associated with this legend. Gugga Pir is popularly represented wearing red attire, riding a white horse with a spear in one hand, followed by Bhajju Kotwal, and blessing devotees with the other, welcomed with garlands by women of the household. Smaller images along with the 'five deities' above blessing Gugga from the blue heavens and a Nath saint Machendranath, depict various episodes from his life (see Rose 1911: 171–192). Further, an *ārati* (hymn) dedicated to Vedic deity Brihaspati at the latter's shrine is inscribed on a green board that has the Islamic sacred number '786' inscribed at the top. While the link between Varuna and Brihaspati is unclear, Islamicate

Figure 11.1 Khwaja Khizr at a shrine in Katra Sher Singh, Amritsar.

(photograph by the author)

influences remain entangled with the representation of Vedic deities. His physical representation follows a similar iconographic template.

In Figure 11.1, on the copper plate, Khizr is standing on a fish holding a sacred book in one hand and a mace in the other, wearing green clothes. Elsewhere, he is represented seated on a fish, still holding a book, with a white beard and white dress. Yet another image attempts to represent a 'Hindu' iconography of Jhule Lal by placing a *tilak* on the forehead. Both are located in the same shrine complex (Figure 11.2), negating any separation between Khwaja Khizr and Jhule Lal.

Images and shrines of Jhule Lal can still be located on the edges of some surviving wells in Amritsar. At the edge of a well at Chowk Passian, Jhule Lal is engraved on a copper plate. This well was in use at least until the 1950s, as is attested by the inscription inside the shrine regarding maintenance (*sevā*) of the well, executed through the efforts of 'people of the locality' of Bazaar Dharmsala Bhai Salo, Amritsar (Figure 11.3). There are several shrines dedicated to Khwaja Khizr outside the walled city too. One behind Durgiana Temple (a locality which was developed after the 1920s) was constructed on

Figure 11.2 The shrine of Khwaja Khizr at Katra Sher Singh, Amritsar.

(photograph by the author)

the top of an inactive well. Interestingly, Khizr or Jhule Lal do not appear in the existing historiography on popular practices. H. S. Bhatti's *Folk Religion* (2000) and Harjot Oberoi's seminal *Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994) barely mention the veneration of Khizr in Punjab. Writing on Sindhis who settled in Lucknow post-Partition, Ramey argues that Jhule Lal appears predominantly as a 'Hindu' deity associated with the cosmology of Vedic deity Varuna (Ramey 2008: 109). However, his hybrid Hindu/Muslim identity coexists in popular spaces of Punjab, where Khwaja Khizr and Jhule Lal are accepted as connected deities, with the former's Muslim association at times represented along with other popular deities. This association with popular saints is variously manifested and mostly epitomized in association with the tradition of *Pañj Pīrs* (literally 'five saints').

Memorializing Sakhi Sarwar, Baba Farid, and Sabir Pak

Sakhi Sarwar (d. 1174), a mystic of mixed Qadiri, Suhrawardi, and Chishti Sufi lineage, is one of the most popularly revered saints of Punjab, with a

Figure 11.3 Inscription at the Khwaja Khizr (Jhule Lal) shrine in Chowk Passian, regarding its maintenance by people of the locality.

(photograph by the author)

sizeable following known by varied names in different localities of colonial Punjab.[8] Three major fairs held in the Sarwar calendar in colonial times – Dhaunkal in Gujranwala, the *jhandā melā* at Peshawar, and *kadmon kā melā* at Lahore – were complemented by similar lesser festivities at other local shrines. Myths and literary narratives illustrating the life of Sakhi Sarwar link him to deities like Bhairava, a manifestation of the 'Hindu' god Shiva, often represented in the legends as a messenger of the saint. Dani, the wife of a Sidhu peasant, is among the ones who were blessed by the saint with a male child. Local votaries offered grain at each harvest, and at the fair, visitors were fed for free (Rose 1911: 566).

The popular veneration of Sakhi Sarwar was criticized by Tat Khalsa reformers from the late nineteenth century in Amritsar and Lahore. In 1896, a prominent member of the Singh Sabha movement, Giani Dit Singh, wrote a Punjabi tract, *Gugga Gapora Te Sultan Puara* (Singh 1976), criticizing the veneration of Gugga Pir and Sakhi Sarwar and their worship among the 'Sikhs'. Harjot Oberoi argues that reform movements 'constituted a sort of

cultural bloc which sought to rewrite the grammar, vocabulary and syntax of culture in contemporary Punjab' (Oberoi 1987: 31). The British civil servant D. Ibbetson estimated Sakhi Sarwar's following as the largest among *pīrs* in Punjab; his popularity as surpassing even Baba Farid's (Ibbetson 1883: 115, cited in Oberoi 1987: 37). In the 1891 Census, 729,131 people in Punjab – 'Hindus', 'Sikhs', and 'Muslims' – stated that they were followers of Sakhi Sarwar. This number declined in subsequent census records, with reform making individuals more conscious of religious boundaries, and census enumerators insisting on defined parameters of affiliation. Post-Partition, two important Sakhi Sarwar shrines (Nigaha) are located in Una in Himachal Pradesh and Moga in Indian Punjab. In April 2011, a major bombing by Islamic radicals at the Nigaha in Dera Ghazi Khan (Pakistan), where Sakhi Sarwar was buried, killed more than 50 people (*The Express Tribune* 2011).

Amritsar has no extant shrine dedicated to Sakhi Sarwar. However, his following in the city is attested by contemporary practices. A resident of Amritsar, Sunil Aggrawal, narrated how his father used to organize a *darbār* (religious gathering) at their house in the walled city that was attended by relatives and people from the community.[9] The saint's public presence is visible through commemorative practices, such as *urs* organized annually in the walled city since 2000.[10] In 2007, the practice of organizing a *qawwālī darbār* was also started, where Daman Sabiri, the *darbāri qawwāls* of Kaliyar Sharif perform. During annual *urs* organized in 2010, Sufi Rashid Mian (a ritual intermediary from Delhi), Sai Baba Mehshi Shah 'Chishti Faridi Sabiri' (*sajjādā nishīn* of a neighbouring shrine Batala Sharif), and Baba Gope Shah (a ritual intermediary of Amritsar) were present. The fair is attended dominantly by a non-'Muslim' audience, except for migrant Kashmiri artisans engaged in wool, carpet-weaving, and wood-carving industries, or migrant labourers from the Gangetic plains who now constitute the city's Muslim population. The fair is organized under the banner of Anjuman Ghulame Chishtiya Sabiriya, an umbrella organization of Chishti Sabiri followers in Punjab, founded by Baba Ghulam Jilani, a *khādim* of Sabir Pak's shrine Kaliyar Sharif, and comprising 'Sikhs', 'Christians', and 'Hindus' across castes like Brahmans, Khatris, Aggrawals, Mahajans, and Valmikis. There are no Muslims in the branch at Amritsar. Thus, commemorative practices like *urs* in memory of Sakhi Sarwar, Khwaja Khizr, and Baba Farid play a significant role in the articulation of pre-Partition memory in the streets of Amritsar. Figure 11.4 shows a poster announcing the 14th *urs* celebrations of Sakhi Sarwar (Baba Lakhdata) at Amritsar and includes two other saints – Baba Farid and Sabir Pak's shrine Kaliyar Sharif through its *khādim* Baba Ghulam Jilani Sabiri (d. 2010).

Baba Farid, one of the most significant Punjabi saints, is regarded as the father of Punjabi poetry and a major contributor to vernacular Sufi mysticism (see Sekhon and Duggal 1992). Farid was a disciple of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, whose shrine is at Mehrauli in Delhi.[11] Sabir Pak (Makhdoom Alauddin Ali Ahmed Sabir) was a direct disciple and nephew of Baba Farid and founded the Sabiriya branch of Chishti mysticism in western Uttar

Figure 11.4 A poster in Amritsar, 2014, announcing the 14th ***urs*** celebrations of Sakhi Sarwar (Baba Lakhdata).

(photograph by the author)

Pradesh. The intimate link between Baba Farid's shrine at Pakpattan in (Pakistani) Punjab and Sabir Pak's in Kaliyar Sharif in Uttar Pradesh, India, might have been severed post-Partition; instead, Sabir Pak's veneration has spread in contemporary (Indian) Punjab. Baba Ghulam Jilani had been a frequent visitor to Amritsar post-Partition and played an important role in organizing a Sabiri fraternity in the city through the circulation of mystic literature, ideology (via ritual intermediaries and musicians), and a wider network of shrines from Amritsar, Batala to Patiala. Major shrines related to Baba Farid are located in Faridkot, associated with the visit of the saint and his miracles (see Bigelow 2012). Most followers assume the surname 'Sabiri', which marks a new form of dissenting communitarian identity in contemporary Punjab, covering a wide spectrum of religious affiliations. Many Chishti Sabiris belong to the Dalit (Valmiki) community.

A minor 'Valmiki' shrine in memory of Baba Farid was established near Lahori Gate on 25 December 2007 by Harish Sabiri, a Patwari associated with the Hind-Pak Dosti Manch, Amritsar, the *chirāg* (lamp) being lit by Baba Ghulam Jilani himself. Morning and evening prayers at this shrine are performed in the Sabiri tradition, with a striking repetition of the verse *data karim sabir, maula karim sabir* (Sabir is the giver and master) by largely non-Muslim disciples.[12] The Dalit community organizes an annual *urs* on the same day, and regular pilgrimage to shrines associated with Chishti Sufis like Kaliyar Sharif (Roorkee), Shamsuddin Panipatti and Bu Ali Qalandar (Panipat), Nizamuddin Auliya (New Delhi), and Muinuddin Chishti (Ajmer). Several Dalit families of the locality have been worshipping *pīrs* for two generations, have dedicated a corner of their house to *pīrs* and follow the practice of using the surname

Sabiri. At the house of Rohit Kumar Mattu (22 years) who works as a sweeper at DAV College, Amritsar there is a *darbār* (shrine) dedicated to Baba Farid, Hazrat Ali Sahib (Shere Khuda), Baba Shah Jilani of Kaliyar Sharif, Khwaja Khizr, Sabir Pak, Pir Baba Nazir Shah Chishti at Kot Khalsa (Amritsar), and the Hindu deities Bhole Nath and Parvati. [13]

Conclusion

The absence of textual narratives complicates the task of exploring popular Sufi shrines in post-Partition Punjab. Within Indian historiography, such shrines have long been marginalized as a residue lacking hagiographical accounts or other documented histories. Yet they stood, sometimes lonely, often silent, and perhaps only witness to the Partition of Punjab in 1947. At the same time, shrine spaces are imbued with the memory of decades, sometimes centuries, of visitation, veneration, and association—both for quotidian observers, as well as for pilgrims and disciples. In post-Partition Indian Punjab, popular Sufi shrines stand as the only testimony to the social contours of the pre-Partition spaces. Religious radicals have made several violent attempts to erase these remnants of the past, facilitating recent electoral politics – a process of othering that has been anxiously utilized to sustain fragile nation-states in contemporary South Asia.

Exploring popular Sufi shrine practices and associated semiotics of everyday faith at street shrines and commemorative rituals like *urs* at Amritsar delineates the pre-Partition memories of belonging in modern South Asia. Gulame Anjuman Chishtiya represents hybridization of identities in contemporary Punjab, imagined and negotiated through an ongoing process of visitation, veneration, and memorialization. Equally significant is the identification with Islamicate idioms like *pīr*, *dargāh*, *khānqāh*, *barkat*, *ibādat*, and the construction of *dargāhs* and *pīrkhānās*, almost universal in the contemporary popular landscape of Punjab. In the post-Partition milieu, especially after the period of militancy in Punjab, these idioms have once again emerged as significant symbols of identity formation.[14] Several *qawwālī darbārs* organized at Amritsar bring together people from varied caste, class, gender, and religious affiliations adopting symbols of an alternative identity.

Kaliyar Sharif in Roorkee, associated with the Sabiri branch of the Chishti movement, is a major marker of this unique identity in contemporary Punjab. Popular Punjabi saints like Shaikh Farid and Shaikh Haider and various other Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi Qalandari, and Nashqbandi affiliations continue to be venerated in Sufi shrines in the state, but a new wave of Chishti movement highlights Kaliyar Sharif as the most significant guiding shrine for the absorption of unknown shrines with new sets of lineages and networks of Chishti pilgrimage in (Indian) Punjab. Though pre-existing networks of Sabiri shrines linked several places from Kaliyar to Lahore, and with important Chishti shrines at Ajmer, Panipat, and Delhi, post-Partition, Amritsar, and Batala (earlier known for their Qadiri links with Lahore through Hazrat Miyan Mir) are now known for their intimate relationship with the Chishti

Sabiri *silsilā*. This new relationship is mediated through the organization of *urs* in Amritsar's walled city throughout the year with *qawwāls* from Kaliyar. Kaliyar, and the popular 'Sabiri' identity, help to legitimize Punjab's relationship with Shaikh Farid and Baba Lakhdata, a continued assertion of pre-Partition social identities in present times and itself a critique of the communal discourse of Partition.

Street shrines, which are neither subject nor object but rather a social reality, are thus embedded in the 'long history of space' of Amritsar. These are sites of living memory, 'a set of relations and forms' that 'explain the developments, and hence the temporal conditions' of spaces that are 'subordinated to the frameworks of politics' (Lefebvre 1991: 116–117). Hybrid saints like Khwaja Khizr/Jhule Lal, Baba Farid, or Baba Lakhdata rupture both communal and nationalist narratives of the city space and provide an entry point beyond the historiography of conflict or narrow notions of religious boundaries. Spatially, Golden Temple and Durgiana shrines are today two extreme poles in the city space and the in-between space is occupied by a variety of sacred spaces that do not fit into the convenient identitarian tropes of contemporary historiography. Celebration of *urs* further opens up possibilities of what Paul Connerton (1989) calls performance of commemorative practices that enliven the *longue durée* of city space. Street shrines also destabilize the polarity of sacred and profane and offer the possibility of both visual and ritual crossovers.

Notes

1 Punjab was partitioned at the time of Indian Independence in 1947, with western Punjab falling into Islamic Pakistan and eastern Punjab remaining in India.
2 Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, a Chishti Sufi saint of Pakpattan who died in 1266.
3 The Tat Khalsa brought about the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, reestablishing direct Khalsa control of the major Gurdwaras, previously managed by British-supported mahants, pujaris, or Hindu priests.
4 'Almost every village, and in large communities, every *patti* has its guest house, known as *dharmsála* among Hindús, or as a *takia* among Muhammadans. This is in charge of a *sadhu*, or, ascetic, or, with Muhammadans, of the village *Kázi*, who also officiates in the mosque. The ruined tomb or *khángah* of some byegone saint, decked with flags and with a recess for a small oil-lamp, will often be found beside it, and it is usually close to the village mosque. Hindu Jats who worship the saint Sarvar Sultán keep up the dome-shaped *makáns* which perpetuate his memory, but these are indifferently cared for' (*Gazetteer 1892–93* 1991: 38).
5 'Out of 21 such Muslim religious buildings, 16 were *takias* big and small; located beyond the wall. Some of them had *khankahs* also attached with them like *takia* and *khankah* Shorewala; another near Gobindgarh Fort; Sipahi Shah wala; one outside Lohgarh Gate with two *pucca* buildings, with *burj* and one of Shaker Shah. There were three *Kabristans*, two outside Gate Rambagh and one outside Gilwali Gate' (Gauba 1988: 16).
6 'The Khojas and Shaikhs among Muslims formed the chief trading class. Khowaja Muhammad Shah and Mian Muhammad Jan, both shawl merchants, were the founder members of Amritsar Municipal Committee…. Many of Shaikhs had orchards or agricultural lands around the city in 1935' (Gauba 1988: 268–269).
7 *Samā* or musical evening is ubiquitous to most Sufi shrines in Punjab and is predominantly held by organizing *qawwālī darbārs* (musical congregations).

8 Sarvaria, Sewak Sultani, Hindu Sultani, Nigahia, Sarvar Sakhi, Sarvar Sagar, Sultani Ramrae, Sarvar Panthi, Guru Sultania, Khawaja Sarvar, and Ramdasia Sultania.

9 Sunil Aggrawal (38 years) was interviewed on 10 June 2010 at Shimla. R.C. Temple records a legend associated with (*baniya*) merchant community veneration of Sakhi Sarwar (Temple 1884: 210–215).

10 Eleventh Urs Mubarak was organized on 20 January 2010 at Chowk Telephone Exchange Amritsar by Mahatma Ashwini Sabiri, Babbi Sabiri, Bagga Sabiri, Jimmy Sabiri, Prince Sabiri, Pamma Pehalwan Sabiri, Gurdip Pahelwan Sabiri, Bau Ram Sabiri, Rocky Sabiri, Vikas Sabiri, Sham Lal Sabiri, Manjit Singh Sabiri, Tinku Sabiri, Jivan Sabiri, Billa Sabiri, Vijay Sabiri, Ashwini Sabiri, Gulshan Sabiri, and D. K. Sabiri. Interview conducted on Prince (Bharadwaj) Sabiri (40 years) who is a government parking contractor and Pamma Pahelwan (Valmiki) Sabiri (39 years) who is an Assistant Sub-Inspector in Punjab Police, on 20 January 2010 at Chowk Telephone Exchange.

11 Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235) was a direct disciple of Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236), the founder of Chishti mysticism in India.

12 Survey conducted at the memorial shrine of Sabir Pak at Lahori Gate, near Amrik Singh Nagar on 29 April 2010.

13 Karan Bhatti Sabiri (23 years) has been to Kaliyar Sharif several times since 2007, the year he assumed the surname Sabiri. Both Karan Sabiri and Rohit Mattu were interviewed on 29 April 2010 at their residence outside Amrik Singh Nagar, Lahori Gate, Amritsar.

14 I have recently documented the experience of two Sufi shrines during the period of militancy in Indian Punjab (Snehi 2017).

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12 Convivial spaces

The art of being together and separate in the multi-religious city of Ahmedabad

Aparajita De

Introduction

One of the most controversial recent advertisements in India was that of the popular jewellery brand Tanishq for its new *ekatvam* line, symbolizing, as the tag put it, 'The beauty of oneness'. The notion of *ekatvam* or oneness in the advertisement is represented through the *godhbharai* ceremony (loosely translatable as 'baby shower') of an expectant 'Hindu' mother arranged by her 'Muslim' mother-in-law at their urban home.[1] What followed was a backlash on social media with widespread trolling of the advertisement and accusations that the brand was encouraging 'love jihad'[2] and interfaith marriages, favouring particular religious groups, and promoting sexism (Hazra 2020, Lingam 2020). Consequently, the advertisement was withdrawn with an apology that produced another wave of criticism, this time by liberals who were of the opinion that the withdrawal denied the reality of interfaith marriages in India (*Lifestyle Desk* 2020). Moreover, the withdrawal of the advertisement was interpreted by many as a moral victory of the 'united Hindus' that also signalled the avenging of hurt Hindu majoritarian sentiments (Asthana 2020). Interestingly, the dimension of regional difference central to the advertisement – that the 'pulikudi' ritual performed by the Nair community of Kerala, South India, to which the expectant mother appears to belong, was being organized by a North Indian family – was completely overlooked with hardly any discussion in popular media (*Wire* 2020). The point here is despite the diverse assemblage of differences to which the advertisement drew attention, the playing out of *religious* differences and the performance of religious identities, particularly those of Hindus and Muslims, were all-important in the public domain. Contentious and politicized debates surrounding religious differences, especially between Hindus and Muslims, have become increasingly visible in the public sphere and appear to indicate the polarizing of these communities into almost monolithic, homogeneous groups. This leads me to ask whether the public polarization of Hindus and Muslims in this rigid and monolithic way spills over into the private domain and the everyday lives of people in urban India. My chapter aims to unpack how religious differences and religious identities are lived with, negotiated, and practiced in everyday life, focusing upon the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat,

which was torn apart by communal violence during the post-Godhra riots of 2002.

Irfanbhai,[3] a well-do-to Chippa businessman living in Chippawad, within the walled city of Ahmedabad, explains,

> The reason the ad created such a controversy was because it talked about marriage. There are certain boundaries that one expects not to cross and marriage is one of them. You can be friends, eat non-veg [food] together but not marry one another. No, make that *never* marry one another. I will not name names, a very well-known Muslim intellectual from the Bohra community some time back had asked one of my cousin-sisters' hand in marriage for his only son. My uncle, I have heard, not only refused but was extremely angry. Uncle felt betrayed by his closest friend and thought that he had transgressed a boundary. My uncle never imagined anything of this order would happen as he trusted his friend implicitly. With the marriage proposal, the friendship too came to an end.

Interestingly, Irfanbhai's narrative, describing a gesture from a Bohra family, clearly indicates the differences within Muslims that belie the popular understanding and representation of the community as monolithic and homogeneous (cf. Bhattacharya 2014). More importantly, his narrative directed me to explore religious differences and identities, religious practices in terms of transgression of boundaries, the contexts in which these transgressions occur, how some transgressions are acceptable and even welcome while others are interpreted as hostile intrusions and lead to ruptures both within and without, and, lastly, how these transgressions are connected to notions of trust and betrayal, respect, and recognition. My chapter thus examines 'spatialities of feeling' and urban cultures and practices that evolve to manage the challenges of living together with religious differences and separate identities.

Transgressions are perhaps habitual in all modern cities, which are 'places of encounter, assembly and simultaneity': the internal boundaries within such urban agglomerations are multiple, transient, and contextual (Lefebvre 2003: 118). Significantly, the boundaries that I speak of are not just moral, cultural, or religious for that matter but also spatial ones. Thus, the material space of the city entangles with the immateriality of religion in terms of 'values, motivations, imaginings and spiritualities' that go on to co-produce a complex relationship between religion and the city (Burchardt and Westendorp 2018: 162). Burchardt and Hohne (2015) also argue that studies of urban religion should take into account the materiality of space and diversity of encounters to create newer possibilities of looking at the politics and meanings of space. Thus, it is self-evident that in any city religious and non-religious ways of living intersect to produce religious spatialities (Garbin 2012, Knott et al. 2016). On the other hand, these religious spatialities are continually being reconfigured by ethnic minorities in claiming, participating in, and becoming an integral part of the city (Baker 2013).

Scholars of religion, more often than not, have ignored the 'physicality, corporeality and spatiality' of religion and have been more predisposed towards meaning-making (Knott et al. 2016: 128). In this chapter, I argue that spatiality of religion and meaning-making are not mutually exclusive; their complex entanglements co-produce religious practices and place-making (Meyer 2013; Houtman and Meyer 2012). Knott et al. (2016) point out that such entanglements of the tangible materiality of religion transform the urban sacred into an icon, a material object, and, in this case, material space that symbolizes religious values, meanings, feelings, and experiences. It is through the physical, corporeal, and spatial experience of these meanings and values of religion that one becomes conscious of the iconic. Others beside Knott emphasize the question of visibility and spatial experience of religion in public space (Garbin 2012; Hancock and Srinivas 2008) and associate it with the creation of iconic religion that is invested with symbolic power. Knott et al. bring new insights and challenges to understanding religion and the practice of religion in cities but are somewhat biased towards specific materialities that might constitute iconic religious spaces (these being primarily places of worship, burial grounds, religious sites, and ruins) and exclude other forms of religious spatiality in the city. In this chapter, I cast my net a little wider to include residential localities and neighbourhoods as equally important traces of the materiality of religion that shapes religious values, meanings, feelings, and experiences. The spatial formation of neighbourhoods and residential localities articulate religious differences and identities through its boundaries and boundary-making processes (Newman 2006; Newman and Paasi 1998). These boundaries are imbued with meanings of trust, respect, recognition, and betrayal producing 'spatialities of feeling' and experience that enrich one's consciousness of religious values and meanings (Thrift 2008: 174). The physical proximity and experience of difference heightens one's sense of identity but also creates intersections that co-produce opportunities for dialogue as much as for conflict and contestation (Massey 2005: 153–154). The aim of my chapter is to understand and make sense of the intersections that create spaces of difference, while they also produce mechanisms and tactics to manage and negotiate with difference.

Locating the field: togetherness and separation in the *Kot*

My chapter is based on the *Kot* or the walled city of Ahmedabad located on the eastern bank of river Sabarmati and founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah I in 1411 CE (Gillion 1968). The *Kot* forms one of the three distinct urban spaces of Ahmedabad as identified by Ghassem-Fachandi (2012), the others being the eastern periphery and the new Ahmedabad on the western side of Sabarmati. The *Kot* is an almost semi-circular area, earlier bounded by the fortified city walls, now demolished, with 12 *Darwazas* or city gates. The Bhadra Fort is considered to be at the heart of the *Kot* while simultaneously being the oldest part of the walled city surrounded by a well-developed group of neighbourhoods or residential localities called *paras*, with Manek Chowk

as the principal business and market area. It was during the time of Mahmud Begada (1459–1511 CE) that the *Kot* was established with its various *paras* like Shahpur, Dariapur, Kalupur, Khadia, Jamalpur, and Raikhad (Mehta 1948). The *paras* consisted of innumerable micro-neighbourhoods knowns as *pols*. Each *pol* was demarcated by a boundary wall with a single *darwaza* or gate at its entrance, which was barred at night (Gillion 1968). *Pols* are usually characterized by compact housing clusters with dead-end main streets and streets branching from them that are too narrow for modern vehicular traffic. The physical boundaries almost insulated the *pol* spatially from the outside world and outsiders. Understandably, everyone within the *pol* not only knows each other but also knows of anyone entering it. Most of the *pols* had a distinctive social identity based on religion, caste, and occupation but over time became more heterogeneous in character (De 2002). Despite their losing this so-called homogeneity, one can find, even today, the dominance of Hindus or Muslims and even of particular caste groups within a *pol* (De 2016). The entire *Kot* at the macro *para* level depicts a social character similar to that found at the micro *pol* level and in recent years the most visible fault lines have been along the Hindu-Muslim divide (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). For example, Dariapur is mostly inhabited by Hindus and Patidars in particular, Jamalpur by Muslims, Kalupur by Jains and Vohras. Presently, Hindus mostly live in Khadia; some pockets in Shahpur and Dariapur, Jains in Manek Chowk, and particular neighbourhoods of Khadia and Shahpur and Muslims in Jamalpur; and certain localities in Raikhad, Shahpur, Kalupur, and Dariapur (De 2016).

In the chapter, I adopt an ethnographic approach based on in-depth interviews that I conducted over four periods of time between 1996 and 2000, 2004, 2012 and 2013, and 2019. The people interviewed mostly lived in the *Kot* and belonged to Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and Christian communities and included the young and the old, with people from all walks of life from shopkeepers and auto drivers to rich businessmen and factory owners, from clerks to high officials in the bureaucracy. Over time, I have conducted nearly 70 interviews in the six major residential localities of the *Kot* – namely, Shahpur, Dariapur, Kalupur, Raikhad, Jamalpur, and Khadia. The selection of interviewees was based not only on their religious identities but also the religious composition of the *pols*, whether they were primarily Hindu or Muslim. The other considerations that were also taken into account were the caste and *jamat*-based identities of the interviewees.

Historically, the *Kot* has been a much-fragmented space ruptured along lines of religion, caste, and occupation, and though it was ruled by a Muslim Sultanate, Hindus and the Jains were considered powerful constituents. Ahmedabad was an important textile centre and traded with West Asia, Europe, South, and South-East Asia and various other parts of India. The textile industry was characterized by skilled Muslim weavers and Hindu and Jain financiers and merchants. Yagnik and Sheth (2005) note that the mercantile ethos characterized the relations of cooperation and collaboration that existed between the communities despite their differing religious

identities and practices. Gillion (1968), too, remarks that the tone of the city was as much Hindu as it was Muslim. Over the years, as the economy grew and diversified, so did the city and its people. Eventually, the old core or the *Kot vistar* gave way to the newer, developed suburbs built around it. The city has been prone to communal riots and sporadic unrest, and yet both Hindus and Muslims within the *Kot* have continued to live together, albeit separately, for the past few hundred years (Banu 1989; Varshney 2002; De 2016). This makes the walled city of Ahmedabad a unique case of what Massey (2005: 149–62) described as 'throwntogetherness' – where people of different religions and identities lived together and negotiated their differences. In other words, the case of the walled city of Ahmedabad makes it possible for us to understand the politics of living with difference (Amin 2012).

Convivial spaces: Between transgression and compliance

Stepping away from the busy markets around Bhadra, Teen Darwaza, and Dhalgarwad and through the labyrinth of quiet, narrow by-lanes, one walks past the innumerable *pols*, *khadkis*, and *khanchos*[4] and can easily imbibe a different yet quaint old-world charm. Harishbhai,[5] a Patel whose family has been living in Kadva Pol, Dariapur, for more than 60 years, informs me, 'I have lived in many big cities but *pols* and '*pol ni life*' (the life lived within the boundaries of the *pol*) cannot be found anywhere else'. On similar lines, Javedbhai,[6] a young shopkeeper near Rani no Hajiro elaborates,

> We own this shop for two generations and have been living further down in Jamalpur. We like it – no, we love it here. Inside the *Kot* and especially within the *pol*, *je maja che* (*maja* here refers to the friendly and convivial environment of the *pols*) I can guarantee that you will never find it beyond the walls of the *pol*. If you need help people immediately come forward, even if it meant coming in the middle of the night. This, can you find anywhere? Let alone in any other city you won't find it in Ahmedabad's *para vistar* (suburbs) also. You tell me in today's world who has time? None of us have it, yet over the years you have been coming to interview me right from your student days. I have given you time and I am sure many others have equally done so. This is not me who is unique, it is the uniqueness of our lives here. What we have learnt here is to make an effort and find time for others, to care for others. This to me is the meaning and '*maja*' of living in a *pol*.

The notion of '*maja*' that Javed evokes, articulates the differences in the cultures and everyday practices within the spatiality of the *pol* and the *Kot* in relation to the lives lived outside it. At the same time, it also creates a sense of uniqueness that connects people living within the *pols* and the *Kot* through their shared cultures and practices. Wise and Noble (2016) contend that conviviality often refers to the sharing of lives lived through differences. These shared collaborative practices connect people on one hand (Neal et al. 2019),

while on the other they evolve a sophisticated mechanism which recognizes difference yet circumvents communitarianism (Valluvan 2016). It is through these cultures and practices in everyday lives that, as Blokland (2017) claims, communities produce shared common values and experiences. I have written elsewhere that the shared values that connect people living within the space of the *pols* are often articulated through the cultures and practices of '*sanga-than*' (organization), '*sath sahakar*' (collaboration and cooperation), and '*ekta*' (oneness) (De 2016).

Haneefa,[7] who lives in Dandigara ni Pol, Kalupur, narrates these collaborative practices that are not only central to the essence of everyday living in the *pols* but also a naturalized expectation that people have of one another and the spatial experience of living in such micro-urban locations,

> there are many positives and negatives about living in the *pols*. But I think the positives far outweigh the negatives. For example, my mother is on her own the entire day but we hardly ever worry about her despite the fact that I leave for work in the morning and am only back in the evening and so do my two brothers, who look after our business after my father's death. All of us can work without any tension primarily because of our neighbours and the way they cooperate with us. We know they will step in if there is any need. If by any chance anything happens to our mother, they would call immediately. Sometimes even before we could reach home, they might have done whatever that was required. Many a times they would not even call us but take care of the problem by themselves. But then this is what we have come to expect of our neighbours and the *pol*.

Ramesh,[8] a Jain Oswal living in Panjara Pol, Kalupur, further emphasizes that these collaborative practices generate a sense of connection and *ekta* or oneness:

> It is not only in crises, like during riots or earthquake that people help each other. It is common to see all the men taking turns at night to guard the *pol* during riots or the women preparing tea and snacks for them. It goes much beyond it. There is something called 'vatki vyavahar' that we practice in the pols no matter what your caste or religion may be. It simply means that if I am in need of something I may go and ask my neighbour for help and s/he would never refuse to help me and neither would I. So, literally speaking, if I ask for a *vatki* or bowl of sugar from my neighbour s/he would give it to me. In exchange when my neighbour requires something say some masala (spice) I'd give him/her a *vatki* (bowl) of it without any resentment. 'Vatki vyavahar' is our culture; it expresses our 'bhavna ane aadar' (feeling and respect) for one another. That is also the reason of our *ekta*.

Just as the culture and practice of 'vatki vyavahar' is symbolic of the *Kot*, the spatiality of the *Kot* in itself embodies this culture and practice. The willingness to help one's neighbours emerges as an unstated norm that underlies the

capacity to live together in close proximity. Rameshbhai's narrative stresses that it is a norm that one rarely expects to violate or transgress in any manner. It is this taken-for-grantedness of the practice of *vatki vyavahar* that also builds trust among the neighbours within the *Kot*, while transgressions of these long-established collaborative practices would produce feelings of betrayal and hostility. But a city is habitually marked by new encounters and experiences of differences, and the *pol* cannot remain completely unchanged. The question that arises, then, is, How does one negotiate with these encounters to curb possible hostilities or resentments and yet recognize and respect difference (Amin 2012; Gilroy 2004)? Amin (2012) points out that negotiation is a continual and ongoing process that is at the heart of convivial spaces and practices. In other words, the contradictions that are encountered are continually negotiated by both Hindus and Muslims, simultaneously acknowledging each other's differences while trying to avert any open conflict or confrontation.

Haneefa recounts that the Bohras used to light *diyas* (lamps) just like the Hindus during Deepavali.[9]

> My father used to say that so many *diyas* would be lit that to an outsider our *pol* would resemble Hindu *pols*. Over the years this practice has almost died out. Perhaps because our identity as Muslims was being questioned by the larger Muslim community. The *Maulvi saab* from the neighbouring *pol* once came to give us 'talim' (instruction). In the 'talim' he told us that we too, that is the Bohras, are a minority and we should stick to our traditions and not forget them. He hinted that the Hindu majority cannot dictate terms to us and we must act and live by our own traditions. And most definitely not borrowed traditions. Many were convinced by the *Maulvi saab*, many thought at the end of the day we were Muslims, so why displease our own community? So, celebrating Deepavali in our homes slowly came to an end. Yet many of us visit our Hindu friends and exchange sweets and other gifts but no longer light *diyas* in our *pols*.

It is interesting to note how the Bohra community members re-negotiated their religious identity within the broader Muslim community. On the one hand, public displays of the celebration of the Hindu festival of Deepavali have almost ceased to exist, thus emphasizing their religious differences with the Hindus, and yet at the same time, the community re-established their shared cultures, shared values, and shared faith with the larger Muslim community. On the other hand, the acknowledgement that they visit Hindu homes on the occasion of the festival and exchange gifts indicates the mechanisms that they develop to maintain their religious differences and subvert communitarianism. These mechanisms are not just limited to the Muslims, or the Bohra Muslim community in particular, but extend to Hindus as well.

Despite their physical proximity and shared corporeal experiences, many Hindus think of Muslim *pols* as having 'gheech basti' or being densely populated, dirty, and diseased. Hindu interlocutors gave thick descriptions of

squalor and stench that were commonly seen in Muslim areas (De 2016). More often than not, a particular set of stereotypes is emphasized through these representations, strengthening intercommunity differences, as well as creating one's distinct sense of place vis-à-vis others to shape interactions and social relations between the communities (Bourdieu 1989). It is quite common to encounter both Hindus and Muslims referring to their homes and localities as 'our' vis-à-vis 'their' areas that are separated by borders, which are often described by the residents as Laxman Rekha[10] or LoC (Line of Control)[11] (De 2015). These borders, like the mythical Laxman Rekha, are not only meant to protect those within but also are communicated to others as a line that is not to be transgressed. Much like the more modern LoC, these borders are agreed upon by both Hindus and Muslims as lines of separation that cannot be violated by either.

At the same time, many Hindus had 'business relations' with the Muslims and considered each other as friends, exchanging greetings during festivities. Kinvanti and Jaideep,[12] a young Hindu Brahman couple who live in Khadia recall how their Muslim friend, Nazia, taught Kinvanti to cook eggs when their son was advised by their doctor to eat non-vegetarian food. Kinvanti tells me that Nazia's husband and hers had 'business relations' and came to their home to teach her. Nazia not only presented Kinvanti with a separate frying pan for this purpose, knowing fully well that they would like to keep the utensils used for cooking non-vegetarian food separate from their regular cookware but also supervised her cooking without entering the kitchen or touching her kitchenware. This episode of Nazia's visiting Kinvanti's home bringing a pan for cooking non-vegetarian dishes separately and yet supervising the cooking of the eggs from a distance, reveals how the two create a bridge, a connection, by knowing each other's 'place'. The art of knowing one's place is crucial to the respect and recognition that is accorded to their religious differences. It is a cognitive boundary that neither transgresses but both negotiate. Place here, as opposed to the relative abstraction of space, is gendered, localized, specific, and socially produced. As Massey puts it,

> Thinking of places in this way implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations. It implies that their 'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them.
>
> (Massey 2007: 121)

Minu,[13] who lives with her grandmother in Raikhad, divulges that more often than not, troubles, meaning communal riots and violence, take place when either Hindus or Muslims disrespect these practices and spatial boundaries. She points out that typically, such incidences of 'dhamaal' or violence occur during Rath Yatra or Holi or during the Muharram processions when either Hindus or Muslims stray into the others' spaces. This is clearly seen as a transgression and an attempt by one group to claim the other's traditional territory. Minu poses me a question, 'If you are a Hindu will you enter a mosque or if

you are a Muslim will you enter a temple? Certain spaces are off-limits for both. When you do not accept them as such that's when trouble begins'. She then points towards the Dargah from her *atari* (balcony), saying 'both Muslims and Hindus visit the Dargah, this is a space that is perceived to belong equally to both. Many a time during riots both Hindus and Muslims have taken shelter there, particularly the women and children'. Minu's narrative brings to light the inherent negotiations that shape religious spatialities in the *Kot*. In the case of Rath Yatra (a Hindu procession), or Muharram (a Muslim one), the others' space is considered 'off-limits', and transgression of these boundaries is read in a hostile manner, leading to conflicts and contestations. The space of the Dargah – a Muslim shrine commemorating a Sufi saint – on the other hand, is believed to be an intersectional space which is clearly one of dialogue and inter-action with one another. Hence, even during incidences of violence, it remains as a convivial space that is shared and respected across Hindu-Muslim fault lines, where they come together despite their differences.

Religious spatialities, I argue, are multiple and transient, as evident from the very existence of convivial spaces within strictly regulated demarcations. The emergence of convivial spaces challenges the fixity of religious spatiali-ties that enforce sectarian differences and points to locations beyond sacred spaces or places of worship like temples, shrines, or mosques where religious difference is 'iconicized' (Knott et al. 2016). A convivial space can be domes-tic, social, or even religious, like the Sufi Dargah, a complex, historically open site of devotion and spirituality venerated by both Muslims and Hindus. Since the encounters with religious differences are at different scales, they produce multi-scalar religious spatialities. Not surprisingly, they are formed at multiple levels. At the level of the *pol*, the convivial element within reli-gious spatialities emerges when Javedbhai and Harishbhai talk of the element of 'maja' and distinctive ways of living in 'their' *pols* and through the prac-tices of 'vatki vyavahar'. Similarly, the space between the kitchen and the living room articulates Hindu-Muslim differences when Nazia teaches Kinvanti to cook eggs without entering the kitchen. The everyday encounters of these spaces make it possible for negotiations to take place between Hindus and Muslims, to make sense of their differences, and to evolve mechanisms and tactics for managing them. It is also important to note here that the negotiations resulting from encounters with religious difference are a con-tinual process that could create new spaces of dialogue and contestation as well. This is evident from Haneefa's narrative when she recounts how Bohra Muslims have stopped lighting *diyas* during Deepavali at their homes, a prac-tice that was criticized within the larger Muslim community, and yet they continue exchanging gifts with Hindu friends on this occasion. This is a tactic for averting both communitarianism and contestation, whether with the Hindus or the larger Muslim community. Convivial spaces are inherently fluid, messy, and contradictory – much like the space of the Dargah – where possibilities of transgression and compliance coexist and are recognized, and attempts are made to negotiate them. Thus, it becomes possible for Hindus and Muslims to live together but separately.

Conclusion: Keeping the border to live with differences

The focus of this chapter was to understand how religious difference is worked out rather than defining what constitutes it. Thus, the chapter explores how religious differences are lived with and negotiated through ordinary and sometimes mundane practices, invoking specific social mechanisms. These negotiations, as I illustrated, are multiple, occurring within different contexts and at different scales. At the same time, I try to unpack religious differences through their urban spatiality and spatial experience as managed through everyday convivial spaces that are the principal instruments of co-habitation.

The *Kot*, the walled city of Ahmedabad, and the *pols* within it have always been perceived as spaces of continual conflict and contestations with Hindus and Muslims living together in distinct *pols* and residential neighbourhoods. Thus, the *Kot* has traditionally been subject to social anxieties and the near segregation of Hindu and Muslim neighbourhoods has reaffirmed these anxieties. Yet the overlooking of differences and, to a certain extent, the management of distinctions is implicit in the idea of Hindus and Muslims living together. The lines of spatial and religious difference within the *Kot* identify how one knows of one's own place but also that of the other. This knowing of one's place in relation to others enables one to navigate differences easily, as one is aware of what is expected and what will be acceptable or unacceptable. Thus, inter-religious marriages are not expected, exchanging gifts during Diwali or Eid between Hindus and Muslims is acceptable, while taking the Rath Yatra through Muslim localities or the Muharram procession through a Hindu locality is entirely unacceptable. This knowledge and acceptance of differences between Hindus and Muslims lead to mechanisms of conviviality and practices of everyday diplomacy (Sennett 2012). Clearly, notions of reciprocity underlie the mechanisms of conviviality, where Hindus and Muslims both accept and recognize each other's spaces, cultures, and identities and do not violate them. The narrative of 'ours' vis-à-vis 'their' *pols* and neighbourhoods may appear divisive but in effect, it serves to articulate mutual respect and recognition of Hindus by Muslims and vice-versa. In this multi-religious space, complying with these lines of differences is construed as respect and recognition of differences, while transgressions are interpreted as intolerant, in violation of the already existing practices of everyday conviviality. *Dhamaal* or violence tends to be an outcome of such violation of boundaries, while spontaneous, improvisational forms of negotiation emerge in everyday lives. These help to normalize difference, allowing Hindus and Muslims to live together separately, within the constraints of urban space.

Notes

1 The withdrawn advertisement is available for viewing at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMOHY4naVYA, accessed 25 October 2020.
2 'Love Jihad' is a term coined by the Hindu right for a supposed conspiracy to lure Hindu girls through false declarations of love into marriage with Muslim men and conversion to Islam. See, e.g. Gupta (2009).

3 Irfanbhai, interviewed telephonically in October 2020.
4 'Khadki' and 'Khancho' are smaller *pols* that are located inside a larger *pol*. Many interviewees told us that usually residents of a particular caste group lived in a large *pol*, and the residents of the Khadkis and Khanchos belonged to a particular subcaste within the larger caste group.
5 Hareshbhai is a businessman owning a small courier company and was interviewed in 2004.
6 Javedbhai was interviewed in 1999, 2004, and 2019.
7 Haneefa works at a non-governmental organization and was interviewed in 1999, 2004, and 2012–2013.
8 Ramesh is a private bank employee and was interviewed in 2012–2013 and 2019.
9 Deepawali is largely a Hindu festival, also known as the festival of lights, celebrated in India to symbolize the victory of good over evil.
10 Laxman Rekha in the epic *Ramayan*, is the line drawn by Laxman to protect Sita, his sister-in-law, as he goes in search of his elder brother Ram who had gone to chase a golden deer and had not returned.
11 LoC is the *de facto* border between Pakistan and India that cannot be crossed by either army.
12 Kinvanti teaches in a local school while Jaideep runs a financial services business; they were interviewed in 2012–2013 and 2019.
13 Minu is currently unemployed but earlier worked as a patient counsellor in a private hospital and was interviewed in 1998, 2004, 2012, and 2019.

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13 Religion, heritage, and identity

The contested heritage-scape of Varanasi[1]

Pralay Kanungo

Varanasi (*Vārāṇasī*) – to use the postcolonial name of ancient and 'Hindu' Kashi (*Kāśī*), popularly known as Banaras in precolonial and colonial times – one of the oldest living cities in the world, eagerly awaits its inclusion in the World Heritage List. However, heritage in Varanasi is a contested terrain. When actor Sara Ali Khan, born to a Muslim father and a Hindu mother, performed *Gangā-Ārati* in Varanasi, she invited angry outbursts from a section of Hindus, as well as Muslims. For Hindus, having a Muslim father denied Sara the right to perform rituals at the 'holy river of Hindus'; for Muslims, ritual obeisance to the Ganges was un-Islamic (*The Outlook* 2020). These responses are intriguing, as many non-Hindus, especially white Europeans and Americans, are seen performing Ganga Arati regularly under the patronage of Hindu priests; Muslims have also been using the Ganga water for ablution (*vozu*) before prayer. In another incident, when Feroze Khan, an accomplished Muslim scholar, was appointed in the Sanskrit Vidya-Dharma Vijnan faculty of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Hindu nationalist students vehemently opposed his appointment, arguing that Muslims had no right to teach their God's language (Sanskrit) at BHU, thus forcing his transfer to the Arts Faculty (*The Telegraph* 2019). The protesters were perhaps unaware that Sanskrit flourished over the past two centuries because of the rich contributions by many non-Hindu European scholars and institutions. These two events signal how the politics of heritage in India is communalized and polarized on religious lines. The natural heritage of the river Ganga, and the cultural heritage of Sanskrit are intrinsic parts of Varanasi's heritage-scape, and neither Hindus nor Muslims have a monopoly over the river or the language.

The idea of heritage has changed fundamentally in recent times. Heritage is no longer regarded as a homogeneous and unitary concept, and natural and cultural heritage are not treated as separate domains. Heritage discourses also reject the idea of the separation of nature and culture, body and mind, practice and thought, tangible and intangible. UNESCO, moving away from a fossilized approach that links heritage only to material culture, has continuously expanded the heritage category, which now includes neighbourhoods, communities, landscapes, and social practices. The 1994 Nara Document on

Authenticity, the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage bear testimony to such an expanded understanding. Thus, heritage is no longer confined to 'thing-ness' with a timeless essence; rather, it is articulated as discourse, process, work, and performance. Heritage is a sociocultural process connecting an object to a practice, factoring in people's experiences in relation to sites and rituals:

> Heritage was not only about the past – though it was that – it also was not just about material things – though it was that, too – heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and act of making meaning in and for the present.
>
> (Smith 2006: 1)

Heritage making is a contested political process that involves diverse actors, groups, and power relations. As a process, heritage is mostly created and recreated in the interests of the powerful, who have the resources to legitimize or delegitimize the term. Heritage making often responds to communalist, nationalist, and political agendas, the process involving contestation over 'whose version of the past, [the present and the future] to preserve and designate as heritage' (Smith 2006: 8). This leads to the notion of 'authorized heritage discourse' (Hall 2005), which works to normalize a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage and to privilege particular practices that may exclude a whole range of popular ideas and traditions (Harrison 2009: 27).

There is a distinction between theories *in* heritage and theories *of* heritage (Waterton and Watson 2013). While the former focuses primarily on issues related to the conservation and administration of 'material heritage', the latter, more importantly, focuses on questions of representation and meaning, highlighting how 'cultural heritage' is influenced by power and ideology. Heritage as a discursive construct or practice selectively draws attention to certain elements of the past; these 'selective traditions' or 'invented traditions' foreground certain time periods, events, and narratives while obscuring others and are connected to projects of identity-formation and nation-building. Heritage in India 'is a vibrant, living and evolving cultural concept which undergoes a process of indigenous modernisation in cities and continuously "makes" place' (Narayanan 2014: 17).

Keeping this broad framework in perspective, this chapter deconstructs Varanasi's heritage-scape, which is intrinsically linked with the Ganges, a natural heritage *par excellence*. Varanasi's heritage formation is a complex and contested political-aesthetic process involving religion, culture, and history. Varanasi is a 'living heritage' (Zara 2016); besides natural and built heritage, the city represents a way of life that is an intangible manifestation of its urbanity. Contemporary Varanasi, though it claims a 'Hindu heritage', being the most 'ancient' and quintessentially 'Hindu' of holy cities, is neither religiously homogeneous nor culturally uniform. Varanasi is multifaceted,

multi-religious, and multicultural, with a population that is 63 per cent Hindu and 32 per cent Muslim; there are 3,300 Hindu temples or shrines, 1,388 Muslim shrines (mosques and mazars), 12 churches, 9 Buddhist and 3 Jain temples, and 32 Sikh shrines (Gurudwaras) in Varanasi (Singh 2015: 100). Besides, no religion, more particularly Hinduism, is a monolith. Within each religion, the shrines represent different genres of material and cultural heritage: architecture, deities, symbols, rituals, and traditions. In Varanasi, if 100 *pathshalas* transmit traditional Sanskrit/Hindu religious knowledge, there are 150 *Madrasas* which disseminate Islamic/Persian/Arabic knowledge; besides, the city has numerous modern secular educational institutions.

In this context, this chapter will first try to understand how the interplay of religion, heritage, history, and identity has shaped Varanasi's heritage discourse. The second section maps the contours of Varanasi's multifaceted heritage-scape, factoring in multiple components: religious and secular, tangible and intangible, natural and constructed/built, performative and experiential to deconstruct contested heritage-making processes. Finally, it shows how this contestation has communalized heritage discourses in Varanasi, particularly with the Hindu nationalist ascension to political power.

Section I: Religion, history, heritage, and identity

Heritage and history are intertwined. History becomes a contested site, as it is not only important what to remember and what to forget but also what to conserve and what to erase. Hindu militants demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, claiming that the sixteenth-century mosque was constructed over a temple site where Lord Rama was born. Hindu nationalists wove influential discourses on Ayodhya, linking ('pseudo-') archaeology, ethnicity, nationalism, and identity. The supposed Muslim destruction of the Hindu shrine in 1528 became a contested issue many centuries later; Rama became a symbol of Hindu faith and icon of national identity when an assertive Hinduism (or 'Hindutva') reclaimed its rights over Hindu heritage. The erasure of the mosque erased the site's Islamic heritage and led to the legitimization of the Hindu claim; in 2019, the Supreme Court of India finally handed over the site to Hindu groups, represented by a government trust, to construct a Rama temple.

Another example is the contestation over Spain's Great Mosque of Cordoba, now the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, between the Catholic majority and Muslim minority, which once controlled Spain for centuries. The mosque was converted to a cathedral in 1236 during the Christian 'reconquest' of the Iberian Peninsula; Muslims were expelled from Spain in 1609. Today, however, they are a significant demographic presence and claim their former Great Mosque for worship. The Catholic response is to historicize an earlier past, arguing that the mosque had been superimposed on a prior Christian church (Astor, Burchardt, and Griera 2017). By a converse process, the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul – built as a church in the sixth century CE, converted to a mosque in 1453 and declared a museum in 1935 – was

re-established as a mosque in July 2020. Space is the terrain of contestation in Northern Ireland's Belfast as well, between Catholics and Protestants. There are many other examples, like the massive destruction of cultural monuments during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the Balkan War in the early 1990s. Mussolini selectively appropriated the past, remodelling the urban fabric by gutting Rome's vernacular landscape built over centuries. Zimbabwe's colonial regime was notorious for the erasure of its precolonial history. Thus, a past that symbolizes the identity of the other becomes, for the dominant community, a disposable past.

Heritage may be a matter of either victory or defeat, pride or pain, depending on one's subjective vantage point. Heritage refers to the past, but it is not automatically transmitted from the past to the present. Heritage making involves a selection of certain cultural forms and norms which need to be canonized convincingly. For example, the Sangh Parivar, or 'family', of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in India successfully elevated Rama from a Hindu god to a symbol of Hindu identity, as well as a national icon by mobilizing Hindus to reclaim *Rāmajanmabhūmi* (Rama's birthplace) in Ayodhya, as intrinsic to a 'sacred' Hindu heritage. On 6 November 2018, the Uttar Pradesh government, controlled by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) renamed the district, formerly called Faizabad, as Ayodhya, thus obliterating the memory of Muslim rule. Muslims were granted compensatory land for the re-construction of Babri Masjid, not within the imagined precincts of Rama's Ayodhya, but on its outskirts. Thus, heritage imbues cultural forms and norms with special emotional value: not unlike religion, heritage formation involves a kind of sacralization (Meyer and de Witte 2015).

Varanasi's heritage-scape cannot be properly grasped without granting centrality to religion within heritage discourses in the city. Religion's influence in shaping cities in India, through various forms of tangible and intangible religious heritage, can be traced back to ancient times. A number of cities sprang up in India as sacred domains from the first millennium BCE with the rise of religious and monastic centres. Later, as temple-based worship gained prominence, cities were built around major Hindu shrines, such as Madurai and Puri, and later around the Sufi shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya or the Sikh shrine of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Cities also emerged as pilgrimage sites, around a deity (as in Pandharpur) or around a charismatic religious figure (as in Ajmer). In an ancient 'Hindu' city like Varanasi, daily rhythms were dictated by ritual praxis and notions of cosmological design (Hancock and Srinivas 2008: 619). The urban plan of Jaipur in Rajasthan, based on Hindu symbolism, requires an understanding of sacred topography for heritage conservation (Narayanan 2014).

It was an erroneous assumption that with modernization, industrialization, and urbanization, religion would lose its influence in postcolonial secular India. On the contrary, there has been unprecedented religious resilience, upsurge, and resistance, particularly after the onset of globalization. Religion is everywhere, in both private and public spheres. In this 'post-secular' world, the secular-sacred divide hardly exists in everyday life. Cities are inundated by

religious events, festivals, and pilgrimages, making secular discourses almost irrelevant. Religion's influence in shaping urban spaces, particularly through various forms of tangible and intangible religious heritage, is clearly visible in many contemporary Indian cities. Religion holds the key to the *genius loci* or 'spirit of the place' in many of these cities, including Varanasi, as it defines 'a sense of historicity and heritage as well as place and community identities' (Narayanan 2014: 8). While symbols, artefacts, imagery, and rituals are all physical manifestations, feelings, memories, associations, and sentiments constitute the intangible expressions of the spirit of the place. In Varanasi, both physical and non-physical aspects of its heritage are strongly associated with religion, from the design of the city and its architecture to ritual and cultural practices.

Heritage has an emotional content as well; cities and places linked to historical 'landmarks', such as a natural feature, historical site, or inherited tradition, produce stronger emotional attachments. This is further accentuated when the 'sacred' component in people-place attachment and the religious component of the emotional and spiritual connections to place' converge: the sacred places 'not only express a group's religious identity, they can also play a significant role in the formation of community' (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009: 312). The mobilization of religious and community identity often leads to communal violence in Indian cities and destruction of the 'heritage of the other', Ayodhya being the prime example.

Section II: Mapping Varanasi's multilayered heritage-scape

'Timeless' Hindu heritage: Kashi-Shiva-Ganga

In textual depiction and Hindu imagination, Varanasi is a sacred pilgrimage (*tīrtha*), a 'ford', or a crossing between gods and human beings. Brahmanical texts like the *Purāṇas* and the *Sthala-mahātmyas* popularized the idea of Banaras as the archetypal Hindu city, a notion emphatically endorsed in colonial representations like those by James Prinsep (*Benares Illustrated*, 1831), M. A. Sherring (*The Sacred City of the Hindus*, 1868), and E. B. Havell (*Benares, the Sacred City*, 1905). Contemporary researchers also regard Varanasi as a unique Hindu city of antiquity (Eck 1983), 'quintessentially Hindu', 'particularly ancient', as well as 'universal, cosmic, and in a sense timeless and sacred space' (Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008: 7). But this romanticization of Banaras as a unique and eternal Hindu city is seen as problematic and ahistorical by other scholars (Desai 2017; Dodson 2012; Freitag 1989; Kumar 1987; Lazzaretti 2013).

Varanasi is an ancient city; archaeological evidence dates the city's origins to the eighth century BCE. The Buddha came to live at Sarnath adjacent to Varanasi; four Jain *Tirthankaras*, including Parshvanath, were supposedly born here (Gough 2020). Brahmanical Hinduism may have emerged in the city around the third century CE. Varanasi's transformation from a commercial to a sacred city took place between the fourth and early sixth centuries

during Gupta dynastic rule, perhaps on the basis of the *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bakker 1996). This construction was concretized in the *Kashi Khanda* (*Kāśīkhaṇḍa*), probably composed sometime during the thirteenth or fourteenth century CE (Eck 1983: 9). Muslim raids from the early eleventh century onwards provided the context and impetus for this construction. The Puranas and the Mahatmyas, extolling the mythical origins of multiple cosmic city-sites, glorified sacred Varanasi as the ultimate pilgrimage destination for Hindus. The idea of the sacred city as a pilgrimage centre still dominates the Hindu imagination.

Kashi is described as *Avimukta* ('never forsaken'), and Hindus believe that the god *Śiva* constantly dwells here, never abandoning the city. This belief in Kashi as a divine, cosmic city is further strengthened by the endowing of city-sites with special powers in the *Kashi Khanda*. Even a cremation *ghāṭ* like Maṇikarṇika acquired a sacred status with the popularization of the idea that *Kāśyam maraṇam muktih* (dying in Kashi leads to salvation). Thus, a conjunction of space, sacrality, and believers laid the foundations of a Hindu heritage-scape. The Puranas constructed the sacred landscape of Varanasi as a pilgrimage route marked with specifically located shrines, springs, and ritual tanks. The prescribed Panchakroshi pilgrimage route was a circumambulation of the entire city. The city's religious life was constituted through spatial systems, including the pilgrimage routes with 12 *jyotirlingas* (Lazzaretti 2013), keeping Shiva (*Viśveśvara*), the reigning deity of the city, at the centre. But Kashi, Shiva's chosen city, also accommodates other deities of the Hindu pantheon: Adi Keshava (*Viṣṇu*), Rama, Sankat Mochan (Hanuman), Kali, and Durga.

Varanasi is located on the northern bank of the river Ganges, revered by Hindus as Ganga Ma (Mother Ganga). In Hindu mythology, Ganga is a goddess, a celestial river, which came down to the earth from the heavens, as well as a beloved consort of Shiva (Doron 2015). The sacred water of the river is used in everyday Hindu rituals, from purification to funerary rites; bathing in the river is believed to purify all sins. Ganga, a natural heritage, becomes a religious symbol through the infusion of spiritual and ritual experience. Thus, Kashi, Shiva, and Ganga are intimately connected, forming an inseparable divine trinity, at once 'cosmic' and 'iconic.' Religious icons may not essentially be given or revealed, but they usually take shape as authorized sociocultural constructs; once established, they foster religion in all its dimensions of experience, materiality, cognition, and action (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016). The iconic development of the trinity – Kashi, Shiva, and Ganga – confirms this conceptualization and is manifest in Varanasi's sacred space.

Brahmanical and subaltern heritage

The city-god-river ritual complex led to the emergence of Varanasi as a stronghold of Hinduism and the concomitant dominance of the priestly

class, the Brahmans. At present, Brahmans constitute around 30 per cent of the city's population. With a dominant role in the ritual economy, it is imperative for them to preserve the Brahmanical heritage – the texts and practices of Hindu rituals. Brahman *paṇḍits* continue to disseminate knowledge about the Vedas, Sanskrit texts, Hindu rituals (*Karmakāṇḍa*), and astrology (*Jyotiṣa*) through numerous Hindu institutions, following the ancient *gurukula* tradition. This Brahmanical heritage is ceaselessly modernized to adapt to different clienteles, particularly the rich Hindu diaspora. For one overseas Indian client (*jajmān*), the Sankat Mochan Temple organized a Karmakanda in which 132 Brahmans performed Pujas like the Navagraha Shanti, Srimad Bhagavad Gita Path, and Gajendra Moksha for 28 days (interview with Devendra Pandey, March 2019).

Besides, Varanasi also has a strong spiritual tradition; non-Hindus from across the globe come here seeking enlightenment. Anne Besant, a pioneer of the Theosophical Society of India, founded the Central Hindu School here in 1898 and adopted education as a means for the 'revival' of Hinduism, inspiring Jiddu Krishnamurti's school (founded 1934), with its programme of spiritual education. In 1916, Madan Mohan Malaviya, a Hindu traditionalist, together with Besant and other philanthropists, founded the BHU, envisioned as a 'Temple of Learning'. Moreover, Hindu *saṃskāras* (ritual practices) require agencies and actors other than Brahmans. Traditionally, despite socio-economic hierarchies, the interdependence of Brahmans and subaltern groups ensured an illusory harmony within the sacred space of Varanasi. As the post-independent Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and caste discrimination, guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens, subaltern, stigmatized Hindus like the *Doms* (Dalits who dispose of the dead), *Mallahs* (boatmen), *Aghoris*, and custodians of folk or 'little' traditions have been demanding recognition and rights as stakeholders in the city's heritage-scape.

Varanasi celebrates death no less than life; it is called *Mahāśmaśān* (great crematorium) as Hindus believe that the cycle of births ends by simply dying here. The *Doms*, formerly 'untouchable' castes, occupying the bottom rung of the Hindu caste system, perform death rituals for their livelihood through the 'business of death' (Parry 1994). Today, several Dom families live around Varanasi's two main 'burning ghats'– Manikarnika and Harishchandra – to offer their services to the families of the dead. Despite their indispensability in the cremation rituals, the Doms are stereotyped as filthy and opportunistic, though their so-called business is not a choice but an imposition, and neither the state nor the Hindu community considers them significant stakeholders in Varanasi's heritage. Yet they are major contributors to the city's age-old practices and modes of ritual operation.

The Mallahs (boatmen, also a 'lower' caste) have traditionally been an integral part of the river economy. As the riverfront developed into a new economic system, the boatmen made their own rules and regulations for ferrying pilgrims and tourists. However, both the upper castes and the state have sought to intervene in this rights-bound river economy by introducing numerous regulatory policies that are detrimental to the boatmen's livelihoods on the pretext

of curbing pollution (Doron 2015: 325–340). Interestingly, the boatmen fought for their rights by invoking their intimate relations with the sacred Ganga 'since time immemorial', describing themselves as *Gangāputra* (sons of Ganga) and drawing upon the mythological story of their ancestor Nishad Raj helping Lord Rama, as described in the epic *Ramayana*. Thus, through this recourse to religious history, the boatmen also lay claim to the city's heritage.

The Aghoris, a mysterious and deviant sect that rejected Brahmanical Hinduism around the eleventh century CE, are stigmatized radical ascetics, described as living naked on cremation grounds to perform post-mortem rituals with corpses, engaging in cannibalism and coprophagy, and consuming intoxicants from human skulls. In the seventeenth century, Kina Ram, an Aghori guru, reformed the sect within the larger framework of heterodox Shaivism. More recently, in the 1960s, Aghoreshvar Bhagwan Ram sought to shift their focus from ritually polluted substances to the healing of stigmatized diseases, establishing an *aśrama* for the care of lepers and other outcasts (Barrett 2008: 101). This intervention removed their stigmas, and their organization became a large, socially mainstream, and politically powerful sect with 150 ashrams and service centres. While their sprawling ashram, located on the river's other bank, forms part of Varanasi's heritage-scape, the image of the naked, hashish-smoking Aghori haunts the public imagination of Varanasi, as in the inaugural episode of Reza Aslan's CNN TV series *Believer* (2017).

Varanasi also has innumerable wayside shrines, representing 'little traditions' and the vernacular heritage of minor gods and goddesses, including vermilion-painted trees and stones. These minor deities represent popular folk Hinduism, promising protection and prosperity to their devotees. Hundreds of shrines are dedicated to Bir Babas, brave folk heroes who suffered martyrdom and became ascetic, locally worshipped guardian deities (Coccari 1986). As land becomes scarce in a rapidly urbanizing Varanasi, the state and its allies are steadily erasing this vernacular heritage by re-appropriating 'illegally' encroached public land, a drive resisted by the custodians of these 'little traditions'.

Built heritage: The riverfront

The riverfront at Varanasi, spread between the Varuna River in the north and the Asi River in the south, fuses the natural heritage of a living river with performative rituals enacted upon the built, architecturally splendid heritage of *ghāṭs* or stone stairways. Varanasi has a spectacular riverfront with 84 *ghats* constructed for religious ablutions and rituals; an array of shrines, temples, and palaces rises tier on tier from the water's edge (Desai 2017). Walking along the *ghats*, one can see pilgrims taking a 'holy dip', making offerings to the goddess Ganga, performing rituals, and praying to the Sun god; thus, the riverfront becomes a signifier and representation of Hindu space and Hindu heritage.

Early representations of the riverfront in the *Kashi Khanda* and the *Puranas* described it as *tīrtha*, and Brahmans promoted this space as exclusively Hindu

through ritual bathing, worship, funerary rites, and propitiation of ancestors (Desai 2017). However, the construction of the riverfront as a spectacle involved elite patronage. The oldest recorded riverfront building, at the Bundi Parkota *ghat*, was built by Rao Surajan in the sixteenth century, and the Maharajas of Jaipur constructed the Man Mandir and other buildings, including an observatory and the Kangan-vali Haveli on Panchaganga *ghat*, in the seventeenth century. After the installation of a Hindu king in Banaras in the eighteenth century, Hindu royal and feudal elites from across the sub-continent, particularly the Marathas, invested in the material embellishment of the riverfront. In 1735, the Maratha chieftain, Bajirao Peshwa, sponsored the construction of three *ghats*, Dashashvamedha, Manikarnika, and Panchaganga; the Scindia *ghat* was constructed in 1835.

Thus the built heritage of the riverfront comprises a series of stepped stone embankments flanked by palaces, monasteries, and temples. Elite patrons included rulers or officials of princely states, landowners, and *mahants* (abbots) of Hindu monasteries. Their objective was to display both faith and authority, vis-à-vis declining Muslim rule and the rising colonial power (Desai 2017). In colonial representations, the riverfront continued to be defined as a Hindu space. Colonial antiquarians focused on the Dashashvamedha and Manikarnika *ghats*, the two principal 'public' ritual ghats along the river bank attracting pilgrims and tourists. Though the built heritage of Varanasi, like the riverfront, was presented as archaic, it was actually constructed between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it gradually became a theatrical backdrop for Hindu ritual and spectacle.

Performative and experiential heritage

Darśan ('seeing' or 'auspicious sight') is an integral component of pilgrimage at Varanasi. For Hindus, *darshan* is a key visual practice enacted through visits to the temple for the 'darshan' of a particular deity – that is, a visual connection with the divine. This applies to sacred images as well as to persons or even places deemed holy (Eck 1998: 104). Pilgrims come to Varanasi for *darshan* of the sacred Shiva, sacred city, and sacred river; they also perform rituals and pay homage. The *ghats*, where river and religion merge, naturally become the ideal space for ritual enactment of such visual encounters. The utmost celebration of vision and experience takes place every evening at the Dashashvamedha *ghat* (where the god Brahma is supposed to have performed the Dashashvamedha *yajna*) during the *Ganga Arati*, a lamp-lit or lustration ritual that attracts large numbers of pilgrims, tourists, and local residents.

The ceremony is conducted on a river-facing platform, and the steps of the *ghat* function as a gallery for spectators, creating a perfect amphitheatre over-looking the Ganges and enabling devotees to have an unobstructed *darshan* of Ganga Ma during the *arati*. The programming, designing, and performativity of this ceremony, from beginning to end, including the blowing of conch shells and singing of devotional songs to the choice of instruments,

liturgical elements, priestly regalia, and ritual style, is precisely and impressively choreographed (Zara 2015). The ritual performance revolves around the sacred act of veneration of Ganga Ma, exhibiting religious, aesthetic, and entertainment components. The devotees are not passive observers but active participants in this public spectacle, praying, singing, clapping, floating *diyas* (lamps), and chanting religious phrases. Thus, *Ganga Arati* on the riverfront is both performative and experiential, adding spiritual capital to a natural setting. By doing so, it has become Varanasi's heritage, though it is a recently created tradition; started first at the Dashashvamedha *ghat* in the 1990s, it became more elaborate over time and spread to other *ghats*.

Islamic heritage: Mosques, mazars, and mohallas

Many old mosques of Banaras, like Adhai Kangura, Ganj Shahida and Abdul Razak Shah, and the tombs of Lal Khan and Ghazi Miyan, bear testimony to the influential Islamic heritage of Banaras. Islam arrived in Banaras in the eleventh century when Mahmud Ghaznavi invaded the city. Subsequently, Muhammad Ghori conquered Banaras in 1194 and reportedly destroyed 1,000 temples. Muslims started settling in the city, and some Hindus were converted to Islam. Salar Masud, known as Ghazi Miyan, a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni who was killed during his campaign (though there is scant evidence for this: see Amin 2015: 9–14), became one of the earliest subjects of Islamic heritage making in Banaras with the construction of his *mazar* (tomb). This continued as more tombs and mausoleums were built for the martyrs of Islam, like the *mazars* of Malik Afzal Alawi and Hazrat Malik Mohammad Baqr, general and lieutenant of Salar Masud, in Salarpura. Other prominent *mazars* were dedicated to Maqdam Shah, Yaqub Shahid, Ambiya Shah, Malang Shah, Chandan Shahid, and Zahir Shahid (Kumar 1987: 263–276).

Among the earliest mosques is Masjid Abdul Razak (1316 CE, rebuilt 1831), named after the governor of Banaras during Sultan Qutb-ud-din Aibak's reign, who became a renunciant at this serene riverside location. Varanasi's reigning deity Shiva faced repeated attacks by Islamic rulers; Qutb-ud-din Aibak destroyed the Vishveshvar temple in 1194, and the Razia Sultana Mosque was erected on part of the site. Avimukteshvar was dismantled by Sikandar Lodi in 1490. In 1558, the Vishvanath Temple was built under the patronage of the Mughal emperor Akbar's minister Todar Mal, but Akbar's descendant Aurangzeb (1658–1707) razed it to construct the Gyanvapi ('well of wisdom') Mosque (so named after a well in the temple compound). The *Śiva-linga*, however, survived and was reinstalled when the Vishvanath Temple was rebuilt by the Maratha queen Ahilyabai Holkar in 1776 (Desai 2019). Aurangzeb also razed Bindumadhava, a Vishnu temple built by Man Singh during Akbar's reign to erect the Alamgiri or Dharhara mosque. Its two tall *minars*, 200 feet above the river, the highest and slenderest in Mughal architecture, are no longer standing, but it retains its domes and elaborate red sandstone and brick façade. One section of the prayer hall faces Mecca, and others open out to the paved court and its central fountain.

Though this mosque is a 'protected monument' under the Archaeological Survey of India, it is ill maintained and attracts tourists rather than worshippers for Friday *namaz*. For contemporary scholars, 'Banaras has been created through the simultaneous and intertwined processes of representation, obliteration/salvage, and reinvention' (Desai 2003: 35). 'Reinvention' is a critical term in understanding the extent to which the 'heritage' of Varanasi is constantly imagined and remade or projected into a 'lost' past.

A contentious past composed of 'narratives of obliteration' (Desai 2003: 27) lies behind these Islamic heritage sites. Most Hindus see them as symbols of Muslim intolerance and religious oppression, though Richard Eaton has argued that the motive for the destruction of temples was not religious but political, as their custodians were identified with contenders for royal power, and their destruction was a means of delegitimizing the conquered (Eaton 2004). This argument does not convince many Hindus given that temples are symbols of faith as much as of royal power. Communal passions are inflamed by historical grievances. Varanasi had its first Hindu-Muslim riots in 1809, with the violence commencing in the Lat Bhairo area and spreading to the Gyanvapi mosque to engulf the city (Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam 2016: 106–116). In recent years, popular discourse has shifted from the metaphor of *tana-bana* (Hindu-Muslim syncretism as 'the warp and the weft') to the image of a Line of Control, with Muslim neighbourhoods being described as 'Mini-Pakistan'. The bomb blast at the Sankat Mochan Temple in 2006 further vitiated intercommunity relations.

Yet at the civic level, *mohallas* (neighbourhoods) and *galis* (alleyways) are an inseparable component of Varanasi's identity and heritage. Traditional mohallas date from Muhammad Ghori's occupation of the city and were named after Islamic martyrs. Thus Salarpura and Alawipura mohallas bear the names of Salar Masud and Malik Afzal Alawi. Varanasi's spatial organization included various types of mohallas. The 'elite mohallas' were occupied by courtiers or rich merchants and their service providers; with the decline of the Mughals, these were reorganized into 'caste/craft mohallas' inhabited by members of the same caste, craft, or ethnic group. A third type, the 'immigration mohalla', was created as historical migration into the city forced migrants to occupy unused land inside or outside of the city (Yanagisawa and Funo 2018: 386–387). According to the 1822 census, there were 369 mohallas with an average of 500 people per mohalla. While mohalla living weakened in other cities, it continued in Varanasi, where mohallas are still organizing units for celebrations and festivals. Hindus and Muslims, with their shrines, are spatially segregated in their respective units and prefer to arrange marriages within their own mohallas (Yanagisawa and Funo 2018: 386). Despite this segregation on religious lines, the mohallas have generally maintained intercommunal harmony and represent Varanasi's cultural heritage.

Syncretic heritage

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Varanasi demonstrated a marked Indo-Islamic character, apparent in the architecture of the built

environment. The Mughals, while patronizing mosques and mazars, also built secular structures like courts, mansions, and bazars, extending support and patronage to Hindu courtiers and religious institutions, such as *maths* (Hindu monasteries). After the decline of Mughal rule, a strong syncretic Indo-Persian Awadhi culture emerged in Varanasi. Mir Rustam Ali, the governor of Awadh, built Mir Rustam Ghat and sponsored riverside festivals and Holi. A distinct syncretic Hindu-Muslim culture, known as *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb*, a poetic Awadhi phrase, found expression in the aesthetics, symbolism, and spirituality of arts, crafts, literature, and poetry. The fifteenth-century weaver saint-poet Kabir, born in Varanasi, had already sung of Hindus and Muslims as the warp and weft of the shawl (*chadariya*) he wove. Kabir's *dohas*, steeped in *bhakti* (devotion), became part of the cultural heritage of both Hindus and Muslims, a legacy later reflected in the poetry of Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869). Ghalib's *Masnavi Charagh-e-Dair* (Lamp of the Temple) eulogizes the spirituality of Banaras and the river Ganga. One of Varanasi's most famous residents was the legendary Shehnai player Bismillah Khan, another Muslim, who performed in the precincts of Sankat Mochan Temple and on the riverfront *ghats*. Muslim craftsmen continue to follow the tradition of making masks for Ramnagar's *Ramlila* every year.

Cultural heritage: Leisure, fashion, music, and food

Varanasi's cultural heritage is *Banarasi-pan* (being Banarasi), which is neither Hindu nor Muslim; it consists of a typical composite Banarasi identity that has evolved over a long period of history. The sociologist Nita Kumar comments on the combination of activities, in 'open space and free time', that constitutes leisure for Banarasis: 'the socially and symbolically most important elements – perhaps the unifying element – in the Banarasi conception of pleasure is the city itself, with its crowded lanes, crossings, bazaars, *mohallās*, and temples' (Kumar 1986: 44). Even the poorest artisans, Hindus and Muslims, take pleasure in strolling in the city, as they do in 'going out' (*bahri alang jana*), and in a range of other activities like bathing, wrestling, or joining group festivities (Kumar 1986: 46–47).

Varanasi has a long tradition of *akharas* (gymnasiums) promoting physical culture through wrestling and bodybuilding in a natural environment under the open sky and in fresh air. The *akhara* bodily culture is more aesthetic and moral than ideological, though Hanuman is commonly their patron deity. Sadly, the *akhara* culture, visible on the *ghats*, is giving way to modern gymnasiums. Hindustani classical music is also part of Varanasi's aesthetic heritage, expressed in the musical style of the *Banaras gharana*; the *biraha* genre of folk songs has travelled as far as the Caribbean, taken there by indentured labourers in the nineteenth century. From street food to *Banarasi Pān* (betel leaf) to *Bhang* (a recreational cannabis-based drink), the city is famed for its cuisine. Moreover, Varanasi's reputation as a centre for textile and silk weaving dates back to 600 BCE; this heritage has been kept alive by Muslim weavers. Stereotyped as 'bigoted' Julahas by the colonial administration for

participating in the 1857 revolt (Pandey 1990), these poor artisans have shown both skill and resilience in sustaining the craft of weaving fine Banarasi silk saris. However, this heritage is under serious threat because of the uncertain future of the handloom sector and the endangered social and economic prospects of sari-weaving (Shukla 2008; Raman 2016).

Ganga: Death of a living heritage

The river Ganges is the anchor of Varanasi's heritage-scape, where nature, religion, and culture converge. It is a great irony that while the Ganga has been worshipped by Hindus for millennia as a sacred river for its pristine purity, and its sacred water is used by millions of living and dying Hindus, the same river has degenerated into one of the most heavily polluted water-bodies in the world. The same devotees who worship the Ganges for its divinity and purity, feel no guilt in polluting its waters. About 60,000 people visit the *ghats* every day for their 'holy' dip; perhaps they do not believe that the water of Ganga can be polluted. There seems to be a symbolic dissonance between religious and environmental world views (Alley 2015).

Interestingly, the attendant priests (*pandas*) of Varanasi make a distinction between purity and cleanliness, arguing that while Mother Ganga could, unfortunately, become unclean (*asvaccha*), she could never be impure (*asuddha* or *apavitra*): 'for these pandas, the river Ganga is a Goddess who possesses the power to absorb and absolve worldly impurities' (Alley 2015: 274). A substantial source of pollution, however, is the sewage emanating from cities, towns, and villages located along its banks, including Varanasi. This has not only contaminated the Ganga water but also the entire ecology of the river system. Official plans for the cleansing of the river Ganga, from the *Ganga Action Plan* launched in 1986 to the *Namami Gange Programme* initiated in 2014, are far from realizing their goals. The death of this natural, living heritage would be the death of Varanasi's heritage.

Part III

Hindu nationalism and Varanasi's heritage

With the rise of the BJP, and Hindutva's dominance in Indian politics, heritage discourses have acquired a new inflection, as the 'pastness' of cities and monuments is ideologically scrutinized and claims are made upon Islamic heritage sites, producing questionable 'historical' and 'archaeological' evidence. The idea of the Hindu nation is a challenge to the constitutional promise of secularism. Islamic place names are being replaced with Hindu ones – thus Faizabad becomes Ayodhya, Allahabad becomes Prayagraj – as though to obliterate their Islamic heritage. Hindu nationalists, having successfully reclaimed the 'birthplace' of Lord Rama at Ayodhya, are likely to

feel optimistic about their claim to the site of the Gyanvapi mosque at Varanasi.

Varanasi's heritage discourse took a distinct turn when the BJP chose its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi to contest the Lok Sabha elections from the Varanasi parliamentary constituency in 2014 and again in 2019. His candidature from what was perceived as a bastion of Hinduism sent a signal to Hindus across the nation. Modi's supporters chanted 'Har, Har Modi!' instead of 'Har Mahadev!', replacing the name of Shiva (Mahadev) in a religious chant with the name of their leader. Thus, a Hindu nationalist icon was in a sense appropriating the iconic value of a god, Shiva, Varanasi's resident deity. Claiming to have been summoned by Ganga Ma to serve Varanasi, Modi performed *Ganga Arati* in a spectacular fashion and used the Hindu religious symbolism of Varanasi in his campaign. His expected victory, with a massive mandate, allowed him to launch the *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) Mission in which the Ganga and Varanasi became a principal focus. The mission improved infrastructure in the city and refurbished the *ghats* (though river pollution continues), but Modi's periodic visits to Varanasi accompanied by prominent world leaders to view its 'performance' of sacred rituals drew the heritage discourses of the city into his aura of Hindu nationalism, making the idea of heritage itself politically supercharged in an unprecedented way.

This is reflected in the Kashi Vishvanath corridor project (officially launched in March 2018), an ambitious plan to connect the riverfront to the Vishvanath Temple, razing old houses, shops, and neighbourhoods, demolishing small but ancient shrines and images, evicting residents and shopkeepers, and clearing narrow lanes to create a temple square, paved walkways, and direct access to the steps of the Lalita *ghat* (*The Hindu* 2019). House-owners and shopkeepers who have lost property and livelihoods see the exercise as destruction of Kashi's heritage in order to re-invent it in the ostentatious, self-aggrandizing idiom of modern Hindutva (*The Wire* 2019). Thus, the typical Banarasi *gali* will be replaced by an open square, flanked by a heritage library, museum, rest houses, shops, cafeterias, help desks, temple offices, and a hospital, befitting Varanasi's claim to be a 'smart city'. Launching the project, Modi declared it a 'liberation day' for Lord Shiva, referring obliquely to Aurangzeb's demolition of the Vishvanath Temple to build the Gyanvapi mosque. For Islamic heritage in Varanasi, the implications are ominous.

Conclusion

The interplay of religion, history, and identity, from ancient to the contemporary, thus makes up the contested heritage-scape of Varanasi. Religion, in its aspects as performance, spectacle, and everyday life practice, is at the core of this urban configuration. Varanasi's heritage is Hindu and Islamic, Brahmanical and subaltern, natural and built, tangible and intangible, performative and experiential. The discourse of heritage formation reveals how dominant actors and agencies, at different times, used religion, ideology, and

power to destroy and create heritage, shaping the contours of Varanasi's heritage-scape through myth and event, text and context, rituals and everyday life, erasure and reinvention. In recent years, Varanasi's living heritage has been subject to appropriations, contestations, and obliterations. As heritage making is a collaborative, dialogic, and interactive process (Harrison 2015), the rich complexity of Varanasi's heritage depends on the coexistence and reciprocal understanding of communities and identities.

Note

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